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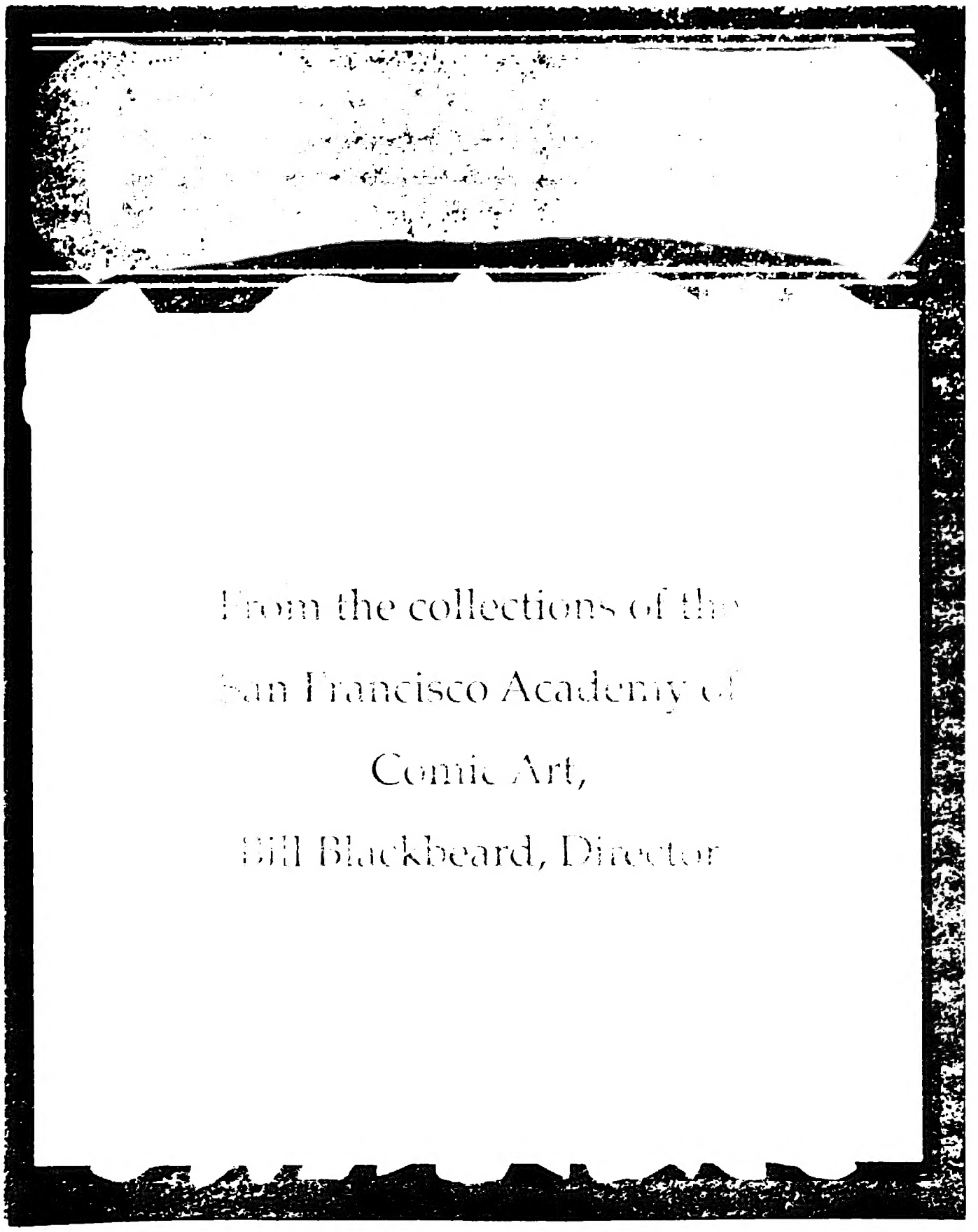

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Drome

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John Martin Leahy

DROME

Illustrated By John Martin Leahy

FANTASY PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC.
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

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"For there is one descent into this region." — *Josephus:* **Discourse to the Greeks Concerning Hades.**

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Preface

by Darwin Frontenac

"But please to remember that although we can prove to our own satisfaction that some things really exist, we can not prove that any imaginable thing outside our experience can not possibly exist. Imagine the wildest impossibility you can think of; you will not induce a modern man of science to admit the impossibility of it as an absolute."—F. Marion Crawford: Whosoever Shall Offend.

On my return from the Antarctic, it was with surprise and grief that I learned of the very strange and wholly inexplicable disappearance of Milton Rhodes and William Carter. The special work of Rhodes was in a department of science very different from that to which my own pertains;

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but we were much interested in each other's investigations and problems, and, indeed, we even conducted some experiments together.

It will be quite patent, then, that, as the *Multnomah* made her way northward, I was looking forward with much pleasure anticipated to the meeting with my friend — with all that I had to tell him of our adventures and discoveries in the region of the Southern Pole, picturing to myself the astonishment that would most certainly be his on seeing some of the things brought from that mysterious region; above all, imagining his reaction when we would behold our poor Sleeping Beauty in her crystal coffin, in which she had lain (neither living nor dead, as I believe; or as my friend Bond McQuestion has it, in a living death) from some awful day in that period men call the Pliocene.

And then to come back and find that Milton Rhodes had disappeared, and with him William Carter!

They had vanished as suddenly and mysteriously as though a secret departure had been made for the moon or Mars or Venus.

It was very little, I was surprised to learn, that any one could tell me. And that very little presented some very singular features indeed. This was certain: Milton Rhodes had planned to begin in a very few days a series of experiments (the exact nature of which was unknown) that would claim his close and undivided attention for weeks, possibly months, experiments that would keep him imprisoned, so to speak, in his laboratory. But he had not even begun those experiments; he had vanished. What had caused the sudden change? What had happened?

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As for William Carter, he was about to start on a journey which would take him as far as Central America. Again, what had happened? What had caused *him* to give over all that he had purposed and go and disappear along with Milton Rhodes?

Here there was but one bit of light, but that light seemed to make the problem the more perplexing. The very day before that on which Rhodes and Carter got into the automobile and started for Mount Rainier, some visitor had come and had been received by Rhodes in the library, Carter being present at this meeting. Some of the concomitants of this visit had been a little unusual, it was remembered, though at the time no one had given that a thought.

It was believed that this man had remained there with Rhodes and Carter for a period somewhat extended. But who had this mysterious visitor been? It was, of course, held as certain that something told by this man to the scientist and his companion was the key to the mystery. But what had the visitor told them?

We knew that Rhodes and Carter had gone to Mount Rainier. But why had they so suddenly abandoned all their plans and gone to the mountain? On the mountain they had disappeared. More than that no man could tell.

And now we come to another enigma. Rhodes seldom drove a car himself. On this trip, however, he was at the wheel. The only other occupant of that car was Carter. And Rhodes had left with his chauffer, Everett Castleman, instructions over which I puzzled my head a good deal but without my ever becoming any the wiser. These instructions were somewhat extraordinary.

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They were these:

If Rhodes had not returned, or if no word had been received from him, within a period of ten days, then Castleman was to go to Mount Rainier. He was to go to Paradise, and he was to go on the eleventh day. And he was to maintain a strict silence about everything appertaining to this whole proceeding. At Paradise he was to remain for another period. This was one of eight days. If, at the expiration of that time, neither Rhodes nor Carter had appeared, Castleman was, on the ninth day to take the car back to Seattle, and then the imposition of silence regarding that part which Castleman had played was at an end.

The mystery, of course, was what had become of Milton Rhodes and William Carter. Had some fatal accident occurred? Had they, for instance, fallen into a crevasse and perished? Or had they just gone off on some wild mountain hike and would they be returning any day?

As to this last hypothesis, those instructions given to Castleman should have shown its utter untenability.

And so the time passed. And Milton Rhodes and William Carter never came back. Week followed week. Month followed month. All hope was abandoned — had been abandoned long before the *Multnomah* entered Elliott Bay.

And that mysterious visitor? Why had he not spoken? Why had he not come forward and told what he knew? Where was he? Had he too vanished? Had he joined Rhodes and Carter on the mountain, and had the three vanished together? And what had he told them there in Rhodes' library on that fateful day?

Thus matters stood when one afternoon an automobile

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came gliding into my place, and there in it were Milton Rhodes and William Carter!

With respect to the mystery of their disappearance, I could for some time elicit from them no enlightenment whatever.

Instead:

"Where is she, Darwin?" asked Milton Rhodes, looking about. "Let me see her! Let me meet her! Quick!"

"So you know about my Sleeping Beauty in the Ice?"

"Of course. The first thing that I did," he told me, "was to get a copy of *Zandara**. We've just finished reading it. And, if it hadn't been for what has happened to us, to Bill here and me, then I might have been inclined, Darwin old *tillicum,* to fancy that Bond had been romancing in that book of his instead of setting forth an account of actual adventure and discovery."

"But, Milton," I asked, "what in the world did happen?"

"We'll come to that soon, Darwin old top. What Bill and I want now is to see your Zandara."

"Well, you'll have to wait till she gets back. That should be in an hour or so.

"But, again, what on earth happened? *Where* have you you two been all this time?"

But I must not go on like this, or I will find that I am writing a book myself instead of a preface to William Carter's narrative.

You will see it mentioned in his Prolegomenon that his

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manuscript was to be placed in my keeping, to be given by me to the world when the time fixed upon had expired. All that I need say on that point is that the *raison d'être* of this prospective measure will be quite obvious to you ere you have read to the last page of *Drome.*

Save for three very brief footnotes, and to those my name is appended, every word in the pages that follow is from the hand of William Barrington Carter.

I hasten to conclude, that you may proceed to learn who that mysterious visitor was, what he told them, *where* Rhodes and Carter went — *where they are now.*

Seattle, Washington,
September 18, 1951.

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Prolegomenon

"Our world has lately discovered another: and who will assure us it is the last of his brothers, since the demons, the Sibyls and we ourselves have been ignorant of this till now?"

"Nostre monde vient d'en retrouver un autre: et qui nous rêpond si c'est le dernier de ses frêres, puisque les dêmons, les sibylles et nous avons ignorê cettui-ci jusqu' à cette heure?"
—Montaigne.

"There is," says August Derleth, "an element of the unnecessary about even the most apparently needed introduction."

What with that element, and what with my own experience, as a reader, with introductions, it was my intention to write

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nothing in the species of a foreword to this my narrative of those amazing adventures and discoveries in which Milton Rhodes and I so unexpectedly and so suddenly found ourselves involved. I thought that I would most certainly have set down in the account itself everything that I should wish to write upon the subject.

But, now that my manuscript is finished, and now that the time draws on apace when it is to be placed in the keeping of our valued friend Darwin Frontenac, by whom, when the period fixed upon has elapsed, it will be given to the world, I feel that there are some points anent which it would be well to say a few words.

In the first place, apropos of the shortcomings, of which, in some instances, I am painfully sensible, of this work when viewed through the glasses of the literary artist, I may say in extenuation that this is the first book that I have ever written — and certainly, by the by, it will be the last.

Whether the fact that this is an initial venture in authorship excuses my deficiencies as a craftsman with pen, paper and words I can not say; but, at any rate, it is an explanation.

Furthermore, far outweighing (so it seems to me) any artistic desiderata, is this: the following narrative does not come to you from any secondhand source or from any source even farther removed; it is written by one who was an eye-witness of, and an actor in, the scenes, adventures and discoveries described in it — an actor that, I do assure you, would at times have given much to be some place else.

Also, in the writing of this book, I placed above all other things the endeavor to attain the utmost accuracy possible; the style was, therefore, in a great measure, left to take care

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of itself. With old Anatomy Burton, though very likely he quoted,* I can say:

"I write for minds, not ears."

Too, more than once when disposing of difficulties obtruded upon me by the noncoincidence of thought with words, have I had in mind this observation of Saint Augustine:

"For there are but few things which we speak properly, many things improperly; but what we may wish to say is understood."

And, similarly, when reminding myself that I had not set out to produce a work of art but merely to put down upon paper a plain and straightforward account of actual happenings and discoveries, many a time did I think of these words of John Stuart Mill:

"For it is no objection to a harrow that it is not a plough, nor to a saw that it is not a chisel."

And so it should be no objection to this my account of our discovery of another world that it has not the charm of Dante's *Hell* or the delicate beauties of Kipling's *Gunga Din*.

In the second place, I wish that I could say more about that mysterious phenomenon the firedrake, Saint Elmo's fire, or whatever it should be called, light-cloudlet, light-cloud, light-mass, light-ghost — sometimes it looks likes luminous

---

*This surmise of Mr. Carter's is correct. The above quotation is taken from a modernized *Anatomy of Melancholy*. Burton, though from what Latin writer he took the words I can not say, wrote:

"Animis haec scribo, non auribus."

—*Darwin Frontenac.*

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mist — but I know no more at this date about the origin of that most remarkable manifestation than I did after seeing the first "ghost," nor does Milton Rhodes himself, and Milton Rhodes, as everybody knows, is a scientist.

Of course, if people were like Trimalchio in the *Satyricon* of Petronius (and many people are) authors or scientists would not need to bother their heads about explanations, conjectures, theories, hypothesis or such sort when telling about strange phenomena or events; for, when some matter was being expounded by one of his guests, a gentleman by the name of Agamemnon, Trimalchio disposed of the whole business in this simple and summary fashion:

"If the thing really happened, there is no problem; if it never happened, it is all nonsense."

But, in the present instance — not to the Trimalchios, of course, but to any person with an iota of the scientific spirit in his encephalon — the fact is the very converse of this; for, if the firedrakes, the light-clouds, did not "happen," there would be no problem at all.

The Trimalchios, I have no doubt, would at once put the stamp of their approval upon this statement, which I lift from *Hudibras:*

> "But what, alas! is it to us
> Whether i' th' moon men thus or thus
> Do eat their porridge, cut their corns,
> Or whether they have tails or horns?"

But the light in that other world is not the only problem to the solution of which I wish that I had something to offer. There are many problems. Here is one: the "eclipses." These are sometimes truly awful.

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For instance, just imagine yourself in a forest dense and mysterious, and, furthermore, imagine that one of those fearful carnivores the snake-cats, is stealing toward you, stealing nearer and nearer, watching for the chance to spring; imagine yourself in such a pleasant pass as that, and then imagine a sudden and total extinction of the light (which is what, for want of a better word, we call an eclipse) so that you yourself and everything about you are involved in impenetrable darkness. How would you like to find yourself in such a place as that and have that happen to you? Well, as you will see in its proper pages, that is just where we were, and that, and more too, is just what happened to us.

And *that* will give you an idea of what I mean when I say an eclipse can sometimes be awful indeed.

Why the light at times quivers, shakes, fades, bursts out so brightly, or why, slowly or all of a sudden, it ceases to be at all, is certainly an extremely curious and most mystifying business.

But

> "To them we leave it to expound
> That deal in sciences profound."

A possibility has occurred to Rhodes and me that is by no means conducive, what with the care and labor that I have expended in the endeavor to be accurate in the writing of this true history, to any feeling of happiness on my part. My companion in adventure and discovery is, however, pleased to entertain the idea that it would certainly be "funny." Funny?

That possibility is simply this: so very strange is the story which I tell in the pages that follow, many a reader may be

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disposed to set the whole thing down as fiction! And, indeed, many a reader may do just that!

Fiction, forsooth!

Well, if any one actually is of that opinion or belief when he has finished reading this book, all I can say is that I wish such a one had been with us there on that narrow bridge, the yawning black chasm of unknown profundity, on either side, when the angel and her demon so suddenly appeared there directly before us!

I have an idea that, if he had been there, he would have wished, and have wished as hard as he had ever wished anything in his life, that the whole business would turn out to be fiction or nightmare!

"Why then should witlesse man so much misweene
That nothing is but that which he hath seene?"

But I must hasten to bring this introduction to a close. Already I have exceeded the space that I had allotted for it, without even mentioning a number of things that I had in mind, and without having yet set down that which especially brought me to the decision to write anything prolegomenary at all.

And, now that I come to it, I feel hesitant. But this will not do.

In my whole narrative, there is, I am sure, but one single allusion, and that most brief — namely, *Amor ordinem nescit* — to my own heart-tragedy; and, as that allusion, even, is involved in obscurity, I will in this place and incontinently make it clear, and I do it by writing this:

I would rather have, though it were but for one single hour, Drorathusa as My Only than have for a lifetime any other woman I have ever known.

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You will, I have no doubt, smile when you read this; you may think Eros has put me into a state very similar to the one in which the poor wight found himself of whom Burton wrote:

"He wisheth himself a saddle for her to sit on, a posy for her to smell to, and it would not grieve him to be hanged if he might be strangled in her garters."

Well, that busy little imp Venus's son (and he's as busy in that other world as he is in this) enjoys getting men and women into just such states of mind and heart. He moved even the rather cold-hearted Plato — I mean the great philosopher, not one of the poets so named, the philosopher who banished poets and Love himself from his Republic — the little imp moved even *him* to write:

"Thou gazest on the stars, my Life! Ah! gladly would I be
Yon starry skies, with thousand eyes, that I might gaze on thee!"

And I would rather have this heart-tragedy mine — have loved and lost Drorathusa — than never to have seen my lady.

"The heart has its reasons," says Pascal, "that reason can not understand."

Swiftly now the time draws on, on towards that final journey which Milton Rhodes and I are to make, and to make with glad hearts, that journey from which there is never to be a return, that journey back to another world, a world where there is no sun, no moon, no skies, no stars — a world where there is neither day nor night.

Vale.

William Barrington Carter

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Chapter 1

THE MYSTERIOUS VISITOR

THE FORENOON OF THAT MOMENTOUS August day (how momentous time, like unto some spirit-shaking vision, was soon and swiftly to show us) had been bright and sunny. Snowy cumuli sailed along before a breeze from the north. When the wind comes from that quarter here in Seattle, it means good weather. But there was something sinister about this one.

As the day advanced, the clouds increased in number and volume; by noon the whole sky was overcast. And now? It was midafternoon now; a gale from the south was savagely flinging and dashing the rain against the windows, and it had become so dark that Milton Rhodes had turned on one of the library-lamps. There was something strange about that darkness which so suddenly had fallen upon us.

"Too fierce to last long, Bill," observed Milton Rhodes, raising his head and listening to the beating of the rain and the roar of the wind.

He arose from his chair, went over to one of the southern windows and stood looking out into the storm.

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"Coming down in sheets, Bill. It can't keep this up for very long."

I went over and stood beside him.

"No," I returned; "it can't keep this up. But, rain or sun, our trip is spoiled now."

"For today, yes. But there is tomorrow, Bill."

But, in the sense that Milton Rhodes meant, there was to be no tomorrow: at the very moment, in the midst of the roar and the rage of the elements, Destiny spoke, in the ring of a telephone-bell—Destiny, she who is wont to make such strange sport with the lives of men. I sometimes wonder if stranger sport any man has ever known than she was to make with ours.

"Wonder who the deuce 'tis now," muttered Milton Rhodes as he left the room to answer the call.

I remained there at the window. Of that fateful conversation over the wire, I heard not so much as a single syllable. I must have fallen into a deep reverie or something; at any rate, the next thing I knew there was a sudden voice, and Milton Rhodes was standing beside me again, a quizzical expression on his dark features.

"What is it, Bill?" he smiled. "In love at last, old *tillicum?* Didn't hear me until I spoke the third time."

"Gosh," I said, "this is getting dreadful! But—"

"Well?"

"What is it?"

"Oh, a visitor."

I regarded him for a moment in silence.

"You don't seem very enthusiastic," I observed.

"Why should I be? Some crank, most likely. Must be, or he wouldn't set out in such a storm as this is."

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"Great Pluvius, is he coming through this deluge?"

"He is. Unless I'm mighty badly mistaken, he is on his way over right now."

"Must be something mighty important."

"Oh, it's important all right, important to *him,*" said Milton Rhodes. "But will it interest *me?*"

"I'll tell you that before the day is done. But who is this queer gentleman?"

"Name's Scanton, Mr. James W. Scranton. That's all that I know about him, save that he is bringing us a mystery. He called it a terrible, horrible *scientific* mystery."

"That," I exclaimed, "sounds interesting!"

It was patent, however, that Milton Rhodes was not looking forward to the meeting with any particular enthusiasm.

"It may sound interesting," he said; "but will it prove so? That is the question, Bill. To some people, you know, some very funny things constitute a mystery. Mr. James W. Scranton's mystery may prove to belong to that species. We must wait and see. Said that he had heard of me, that, as I have a gift (that is what he called it, Bill, a gift) of solving puzzles and mysteries, whether scientific, psychic, spooky or otherwise—well, he had a story to tell me that would eclipse any I ever had heard, a mystery that would drive Sherlock Holmes himself to suicide. Yes, that's what he really said, Bill—the great Sherlock himself to suicide."

"That's coming big!" I said.

Milton Rhodes smiled wanly.

"We haven't heard his yarn yet. We can't come to a judgment on such uncertain data."

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"Scranton," said I. "Scranton. Hold on a minute."

"What is it now?"

"Wonder if he belongs to the old Scranton family."

"Never heard of it, Bill."

"Pioneers," I said. "Came out here before ever Seattle was founded. Homesteaded down at Puyallup or somewhere, about the same time as Ezra Meeker. It seems to me—"

"Well?" queried Milton Rhodes after some moments, during which I tried my level best to recollect the particulars of a certain wild, gloomy story of mystery and death and horror that I had heard long years before — in my boyhood days, in fact.

"I can not recollect it," I told him. "I didn't understand it even when I heard the man, an old acquaintance of the Scrantons, tell the story—a story of some black fate, some curse that had fallen upon the family."

"So that's the kind of mystery it is! From what the man said, though that was vague, shadowy, I thought that it was something very different. I thought that it was *scientific*."

"Maybe it is. We are speculating, you know, if one may call it that, on pretty flimsy data. One thing: I distinctly remember that Rainier had something to do with it."

"What Rainier?"

"Why, Mount Rainier."

"This is becoming intriguing," said Milton Rhodes, "if it isn't anything else. You spoke of a black fate, a curse: what has noble Old He, as the old mountain-men called Rainier, to do with such insignificant matters as the destinies of us insects called humans?"

"According to the old fellow I mentioned, that old

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acquaintance of the Scrantons, it was there, on Rainier, that this dark and mysterious business started."

"What was it that started?"

"That's just it. The man didn't know himself what had happened up there."

"Hum," said Milton Rhodes.

"That," I went on, "was many years ago. It was just, I believe, after Kautz climbed the mountain. Yes, I am sure he said 'twas just after that. And this man who told us the story—his name was Simpson—said 'twas something that Scranton learned on Kautz's return to Steilacoom that led to his, Scranton's, visit, to Old He. Not from Kautz himself, though Scranton knew the lieutenant well, but from the soldier Hamilton."

"What was it that he learned?"

"There it is again!" I told him. "Simpson said he could tell what that something was, but he told us that he would not do so."

"A very mysterious business," smiled Milton Rhodes. "I hope that our visitor's story, whatever it is, will prove more definite."

"Wasn't it," I asked, "in the fifties that Kautz made the ascent?"

"In July, 1857. And pretty shabbily has history treated him, too. It's always Stevens and Van Trump, Van Trump and Stevens. Why, their Indian, Sluiskin, is better known than Kautz!"

"But I thought," said I, "that Stevens and Van Trump were the very first men to reach the summit of Mount Rainier."

"Oh, don't misunderstand me, Bill," answered Milton

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Rhodes. "All honor to Stevens and Van Trump, the first of men to reach the very top of the mountain; but all honor, too, to the first white man to set foot on Rainier, the discoverer of the great Nisqually Glacier, the first to stand upon the top of Old He, though adverse circumstances prevented his reaching the highest point."

"Amen," said I—as little dreaming as Kautz, Stevens and Van Trump themselves had ever done of that discovery which was to follow, and soon now at that.

For a time we held desultory talk, then fell silent and waited.

There was a lull in the storm; the darkness lifted, then suddenly it fell again, and the rain began to descend with greater violence than ever.

Milton Rhodes had left his chair and was standing by one of the eastern windows.

"This must be our visitor, Bill," he said suddenly.

I arose and went over to his side, to see a big sedan swinging in to the curb.

"Yes!" exclaimed Rhodes, his face beginning to brighten. "There is Mr. James W. Scranton.

"Let us hope, Bill," he added, "that the mystery which he is bringing us will prove a real one, real and scientific."

The next moment a slight figure, collar up to ears, stepped from the car and headed swiftly up the walk, leaning sidewise against the wind and rain.

" 'Now is the dramatic moment of fate, Watson'," quoted Milton Rhodes with a smile as he started towards the door, " 'when you hear a step upon the stair which is walking into your life, and you know not whether for good or ill'."

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Chapter 2

WHAT HE TOLD US

A FEW MOMENTS, AND MILTON Rhodes and his visitor entered the room.

"My friend Mr. Carter," Rhodes remarked to Mr. James W. Scranton as he introduced us, "has assisted me in some of my problems; he is my colleague, so to say, and you may speak with the utmost confidence that your story, if you wish it so, will be held an utter secret."

"For the present, I wish it to be a secret," returned Scranton, seating himself in the chair which Rhodes had pushed forward, "and so always if no discovery follows. If, however, you discover things—and I have no doubt that you will do so—why, then, of course, you may make everything public where, when and in whatsoever manner you wish."

"And so," said Milton, "you bring us a mystery—a scientific mystery."

"Yes, Mr. Rhodes. It is scientific, and I believe that it will prove to be something more. In all probability stranger

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than any which any man *on* this earth has ever known."

There was not the slightest change on Milton Rhodes' features, and yet I could have sworn that a slight fleeting smile had touched them. I turned my look back to our visitor, and I saw upon his face an expression so strange that I stared at him in something very like surprise.

What was it that this man was going to tell us?

Soon that expression was gone, though its shadow still rested on his thin and pale features.

"This mystery of which I have come to tell you," he said suddenly, "is an old, old one."

I glanced at Milton Rhodes.

"Then why," he asked, "bring it to me?"

An enigmatic smile flitted across Scranton's face.

"Because it is *new* as well. You will soon see what I mean, Mr. Rhodes. You will see why, after all these years, I suddenly found myself so anxious to see you that I couldn't even wait until this storm and deluge ended."

From the inside pocket of his coat he drew a leather-covered notebook, much worn and evidently very old.

"This," said he, holding the book up between thumb and forefinger, "is the journal kept by my grandfather, Charles Scranton, during his journey to, and partial ascent of, Mount Rainier in the year 1858."

Milton Rhodes glanced over at me and said:

"Our little deduction, Bill, wasn't so bad, after all."

Scranton turned his eyes from one to the other of us with a questioning look.

"Mr. Carter," Rhodes explained, "was just telling me about that trip, and he wondered if you belonged to the old pioneer Scranton family."

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"This," exclaimed the other, "is something of a surprise to me! Few people, I thought, very few people, even knew of the journey."

"Well, Mr. Carter happens to be one of the few."

"May I ask," said Scranton, addressing himself to me, "how you learned that my grandfather had visited the mountain? And *what* you know?"

"When I was a boy, I heard a man—his name was Simpson—tell about it."

"Oh," said Scranton, and it was as though some fear or some thing of dread had suddenly left him.

"His story, however," I added, "was vague, mysterious. Even at the time I couldn't understand what it was all about."

"Of course. For, though Simpson knew of the journey, he knew but little of what had *happened.* And more than once did I hear my grandfather express regret that he had told Simpson even as much as he had. I suppose there was something, perhaps a great deal, of that I-could-tell-a-lot-if-I-wanted-to in Simpson's yarn."

"There was," I nodded.

"The man, however, knew virtually nothing—in fact, nothing at all about *it.* I have no doubt, though, that he did a lot of guessing. I don't believe that my grandfather, dead these many years now, ever told a single living soul all. And, as for all that he told me—well, I can't tell everything even to you, Mr. Rhodes."

A strange look came into the eyes of Milton Rhodes, but he rémained silent.

Scranton raised the notebook again.

"Nor is everything here. Nor do I propose to read everything that is here. Just now the details do not matter.

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It is the facts, the principal facts, with which we have to do now. This record, if you are interested—and I have no doubt that you will be—I shall leavé in your hands until such time as you care to return it to me.

"Now for my grandfather's journey.

"With three companions, he left the old homestead near what is now Puyallup, on the 16th of August, 1858. At Steilacoom, they got an Indian guide, Sklokoyum by name. The journey was made on horseback to the Sick Moon Prairie.* There the animals were left, with one man to guard them, and my grandfather, his two companions and the Indian—this guide, however, had never been higher up the Nisqually River than Copper Creek—set out on foot for the mountain."

"One moment," Milton Rhodes interrupted. "According to that Simpson, it was something that your grandfather heard from the soldier Hamilton, and not from Kautz himself, that led to his making this journey to Mount Rainier. Is that correct?"

"Yes; it is correct."

"May I ask, Mr. Scranton, what it was that he learned?"

Again that enigmatic smile on Scranton's face. He tapped the old journal.

"You will learn that, Mr. Rhodes, when you read this record."

"I see. Pray proceed."

**Sick Moon: Old Moon* in the Chinook jargon.—Darwin Frontenac.

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Chapter 3

THE MYSTERY OF OLD HE

IT WAS ABOUT THREE O'CLOCK IN the afternoon of the 24th," said Scranton, "that they reached the foot of the Nisqually Glacier, called Kautz Glacier by my grandfather. As for what followed, I shall give you that in my grandfather's own words."

He opened the book, at a place marked with a strip of paper, and read from it the following:

"August 24th, 10 p.m.—At last we are on the mountain. And how can I set it down—this thing that has happened? What I write here must be inadequate indeed, but I shall not worry about that, for a hundred years could never dim the memory of what I saw. I have often wondered why the Indians were afraid of Rainier; I know now. And what do I really know? I know what I saw, I know what happened; but only God in Heaven knows what it means.

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"Got started early. Still following the river. Going very difficult. Crossed stream a number of times and once had to take to the woods. Reached the glacier about three o'clock—an enormous wall of dirty ice, four or five hundred feet in height, with the Nisqually flowing right out of it. Day had turned dark and threatening. Climbed the eastern wall of the cañon. Clouds suddenly settled down—a fog cold and thick and dripping—and we made camp by a tiny stream, near the edge of the cañon cut by the glacier. Soon had a good fire burning. And it was not long before it came—the shrouded figure and with it that horrible shape, 'if,' as old Milton has it in *Paradise Lost,* 'shape it might be called that shape had none.'

"At times the fog would settle down so thick we could see no farther than fifty feet. Then suddenly objects could be made out two or three hundred feet away. At the moment the fog was about us thicker than ever. We were sitting by the fire, warming ourselves and talking—White, Long and myself. All at once there was an exclamation. I looked at Long, and what I saw on his face and in his eyes brought me to my feet in an instant and whirled my look up in that direction in which he was staring.

"And there on the top of the bank, not more than thirty feet from us, stood a tall, white, shrouded figure, a female figure, and beside it, seemingly squatting like a monstrous toad, was that dark shape that had no shape. But, though shape it had none, it had eyes—big eyes that burned at us with a greenish, hellish fire.

"White snatched up his rifle and thrust it forward, but I stepped over and shoved the muzzle aside. When we

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looked up there again, the woman, for a woman, a white woman too, it certainly was—well, she was gone, and with her that formless thing with the hellish fire in its big eyes.

"'What was it?' exclaimed White.

"He rubbed his eyes and stared up there again, then this way and that, all about into the thick vapor.

"'Was it only a dream?'

"'It was real enough,' I told him. 'It was a woman, a white woman.'

"'Or,' put in Long, 'the spirit of one.'

"'I know one thing,' said White: 'she may be a flesh-and-blood creature, and she may be a spirit; but that thing that crouched there beside her was not of this world of ours!'

"He shuddered.

"'Not of this world of ours! Men, what *was* that thing?'

"That, of course, was a question that neither Long nor myself could answer.

"'If,' I said, 'it hadn't been for this fog! If we could only have seen them better!'

"Of a sudden White exclaimed:

"'Where's Sklokoyum?'

"'Not far,' I told him. 'Say—he was up there, up there where they came from. Come, let's look into this.'

"I sprang up the bank. They followed. A moment, and we were in that very spot where the woman and the thing had stood so brief a space before.

"'It was no dream, at any rate,' observed Long, pointing to the crushed purple flowers—a species, I believe, of aster.

"'No,' I returned; 'it was not a dream.'

"'Maybe,' said White, peering about, 'we'll wish, before this business is ended, that it all had been a dream.'

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"Came a loud scream from above. Silence. And then the crash of some heavy body through the branches and shrubs.

"'Sklokoyum!' I cried.

"White's hand closed on my arm with the grip of a vice.

"'Hear that?'

"I heard it. It was the voice of a woman or a girl.

"'She's calling,' said Long, 'calling to *it.*'

"'Great Heaven!' I exclaimed. 'It's after the Indian! Come!'

"I started up, but I had taken only a half-dozen springs or so when Sklokoyum came leaping, plunging into view. I have seen fear, horrible fear, that of cowards and the fear of brave men; but never had I, never have I, seen anything like that fear which I saw now. And Sklokoyum, whatever his faults, has a *skookum tumtum*—in other words, is no coward.

"Down the Indian came plunging. There was a glimpse of a blood-covered visage; then he was past. The next instant a shock, a savage oath from White, and he and the Siwash fell in a heap, went over the edge and rolled down the bank and clean to the fire.

"Long and I followed, keeping a sharp lookout behind us, and, indeed, in every direction. But no glimpse was caught of any moving thing, nor did the faintest sound come to us from out that cursed vapor, settling on the trees and dripping, dripping, dripping.

"Sklokoyum's right cheek was slashed as though by some great talon, and he had been terribly bitten in the throat.

"'A little more,' observed Long, 'and it would have been

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the jugular, and that would have meant *klahowya,* Sklokoyum.'

"The Indian declared that he had been attacked by a demon, a *klale tamahnowis,* a winged fiend from the white man's hell itself. What was it like? Sklokoyum could not tell us that. All he knew was that the demon had wings, teeth a foot in length and that fire shot out of its eyes and smoke belched from its nostrils. And surely it would have killed him (and I have no doubt that it would have) if an angel, an angel from the white man's Heaven, had not come and driven it off. What was the angel like? Sklokoyum could not describe her, so wonderful was the vision. And her voice—why, at the very sound of her voice, that horrible *tamahnowis* flapped its wings and slunk away into the fog and the gloom of the trees.

"Poor Sklokoyum! No wonder he gave us so wild an account of what had happened up there! And, said he, to remain here would be certain death. We must go back, start at once. Well, we are still here, and we are not going to turn back at this spot, though I have no doubt that Sklokoyum himself will do so the very first thing in the morning.

"The fog is thinning. Now and again I see a star gleaming down with ghostly fire. We came here seeking a mystery; well, we certainly have found one. I wonder if I can get any sleep tonight. Long is to relieve me at twelve o'clock. For, of course, we can not, after what has happened, leave our camp without a guard. And I wonder if—what, though, is the good of wondering? But what is she, Sklokoyum's angel? And what is that *klale tamahnowis,* that demon? And where is the angel now?"

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Chapter 4

"VOICES!"

SCRANTON CLOSED THE JOURNAL on the forefinger of his right hand and looked at Milton Rhodes.

"Well," said he, "what do you think of that?"

Rhodes did not say what he thought of it. I thought that I knew, though I had to acknowledge that I wasn't sure just what I thought of this wild yarn myself.

After a little silence, Milton Rhodes asked:

"Is that all?"

"All? Indeed, no!" returned Scranton.

He opened the book and prepared to read from it again.

"This adventure that I have just read to you," he said looking over the top of the journal at Milton Rhodes, "took place in what is now known as Paradise Park—a Paradise where, as you well know, there is sometimes twenty-five feet of snow in the winter."

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"Of course that was the place," Milton nodded, "for they had climbed the eastern wall of the cañon and had camped near the edge."

"And the one that followed," Scranton added, "on what we now call the Cowlitz Glacier. I believe, Mr. Rhodes, that you have visited Rainier a number of times?"

"Many times, Mr. Scranton. Few men, I believe, know the great mountain better than I do; and I never followed in the footsteps of a guide, imported or otherwise, either."

"Then, in all likelihood, you know the Tamahnowis Rocks in the Cowlitz Glacier."

"I have been there a dozen times."

"Did you ever, Mr. Rhodes, notice anything unusual at that place?"

"Nothing whatever. I found the ascent of the rocks themselves rather difficult and the crevasses there interesting, but nothing more."

"Well, it was there," said Scranton, "that what I am going to read to you now took place. Yes, I know that it was there at the Tamahnowis Rocks, though I myself never could find anything there, either. And now, after all these long years, once more it is in that very spot that—"

He broke off abruptly and dropped his look to the old record.

Milton Rhodes leaned forward.

"Mr. Scranton," he asked, "what were you going to say?"

Scranton tapped the old journal with a forefinger.

"*This* first," he said. "Then *that*."

"The story begins to take shape," observed Milton Rhodes; and I wondered what on earth he meant. "Pray proceed."

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Whereupon the other raised the book, cleared his throat with an ahem and started to read to us this astonishing record:

"August 25th.—I was right: the very first thing in the morning the Indian left us. Nothing could induce him to go forward, to remain at the camp even. The demons of Rainier would get us, said he, if we went on—the terrible *tamahnowis* that dwelt in the fiery lake on the summit and in the caverns in the mountain side, caverns dark and fiery and horrible as the caves in hell itself. Had we not had warning? One had come down here, even among the trees, and undoubtedly it would have killed us all had it not been for that angel. He, Sklokoyum, would not go forward a single foot. He was going to *klatawah hyak kopa Steilacoom.* How the old fellow begged us to turn back, too! It was quite touching, as was his leave-taking when he finally saw that we were determined to go on. Old Sklokoyum acted as though he was taking leave of the dead—as, indeed, he was. And at last he turned and left us, and in a few minutes he had vanished from sight.

"How I wish to God now that we had gone back with him!"

At this point, Scranton paused and said:

"The Indian was never seen again or even heard of again."

The account (which I am copying from the journal itself) went on thus:

"Fog disappeared during the night. A fairer morning, I believe, never dawned on Rainier. Sky the softest, the loveliest of blues. A few fleecy clouds about the summit of the mountain, but not a single wisp of vapor to be seen anywhere else in all the sky.

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"Proceeded to get a good survey of things. From the edge of the cañon, got a fine view clear down the glacier and clear up it, too. Ice here covered with dirt and rock-fragments, save a strip in the middle, showing white and bluish. Badly crevassed. It must have been right about here that Kautz left the glacier. He climbed the cliffs on the other side, and then, the next morning, he started for the top. It seemed, to us, however, that the ascent could be made more easily on this side. But we were not headed for the summit; we had a mystery to solve, and we immediately set about trying to do it.

"We started to trail them—the angel and that thing with the big eyes that burned with a greenish, hellish fire. Where they had crushed through the flower-meadows, this was not difficult. At other places, however, no more sign than if they had moved on through the air itself. One thing was soon clear: they had held steadily *upward,* never swinging far from the edge of that profound cañon in which flows that mighty river of ice.

"The ground became rocky. No sign. Then at last, in a sandy spot, we suddenly came to the plain prints left by the feet of the angel as she passed there, and, mingled with those prints, there were marks over which we bent in perplexity and then in utter amazement.

"These marks were about eight inches in length, and, as I looked at them, I felt a shiver run through me and I thought of a monstrous bird and even of a reptilian horror. But that squatting form we had seen for those few fleeting moments—well, *that* had not been either a bird or a reptile.

"'One thing,' said Long, 'is plain: *it* was leading and the angel was following.'

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"White and I looked closely, and we saw that this had certainly been so.

"'It appears,' Long remarked, 'that the fog didn't interfere any with their journey. They seem to have gone along as steadily and surely as if they had been in bright sunshine.'

"'I wonder,' White said, 'if the thing was smelling the way back like a dog.'

"'Back where?' I asked. 'And I see no sign of a down trail.'

"'Lord,' exclaimed Long, looking about uneasily, 'the Siwashes say that queer things go on up here, that the mountain is haunted; and, blame me, if I ain't beginning to think that they are right! Maybe, before we are done, we'll wish that we had turned back with old Sklokoyum.'

"I didn't like to hear him talk like that. He spoke as though he were jesting, but I knew that superstitious dread had laid a hand upon him.

"'Nonsense!' I laughed. 'Haunted? That woman that we saw and that thing—well, we know that they were real enough, and we knew that even when we didn't have these footprints to tell us.'

"Oh, they are real, all right,' said Long. 'But real *what?*'

"A little while after that, we came to a snowfield, an acre or two in extent, and there we made a strange discovery. The trail led right across it. And it was plain that *it* had still been leading and the angel had been following. Of a sudden White, who was in advance, exclaimed and pointed.

"'Look at that,' he said. 'See that? Its tracks end here.'

"And that is just what they did! But the tracks of the angel went right on across the snow.

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"'Where did the thing go to?' I wondered.

"'Perhaps,' suggested Long, 'she picked it up and carried it.'

"But I shook my head.

"'A woman—or a man either, for the matter of that—carrying that thing!' White exclaimed. 'She could never have done that. And you can see for yourself; she never even paused here. Had she stopped to pick the thing up—what a queer thought—we would have the story written here in the snow.'

"'Then,' said Long, 'it must have gone on through the air.'

"'Humph!' White ejaculated. 'Through the air! Well, Sklokoyum said that the thing has wings—the bat wings of the white man's devil!'

"'But,' I objected, 'Sklokoyum was so badly scared that he didn't know what he saw.'

"I wonder,' said White.

"Beyond the snowfield, the place was strewn in all directions with rock-fragments. It was comparatively level, however, and the going was not difficult. A tiny stream off to the right, a steep rocky mass before us. We were soon, having crossed the stream, ascending this. It was a steep climb, but we were not long in getting up it. At this place we passed the last shrub. We figured that we must be near an altitude of seven thousand feet now. Dark clouds forming. At times, in a cloud-shadow, the place would have a gloomy and wild aspect. No trail, though at intervals we would find a disturbed stone or faint marks in the earth. Our route lay along a broken ridge of rock. On our left the land fell away toward Kautz's Glacier [the Nisqually]

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while on the right, coming up close, was another glacier [the Paradise] white and beautiful.

"Ere long we reached a point where the ridge had a width of but a few yards, a small glacier on the left, the great beautiful one on the other side. And here we found it, found the trail of the thing and Sklokoyum's angel. They had come up along the edge of the ice on our left (to avoid the climb up over the rocks) crossed over the ridge (very low at this point) and held steadily along the glacier, keeping close to the edge. And in that dense fog! And just to the right the ice went sweeping down, like a smooth frozen waterfall. A single false step there, and one would go sliding down, down into yawning crevasses. How had they done it? And to where had they been going, in this region of barren rock and eternal snow and ice, through that awful fog and with night drawing on?

"There was but one way to get the answer to that, and that was to follow.

"And so we followed.

"And how can I set down here what happened? I can not. I simply can not. Not that it matters, for it can never, in even the slightest feature, fade from my mind. It may be that I shall find myself wishing that some of it would.

"Clouds grew larger, thicker, blacker. The change was a sudden, sinister one; there seemed to be something uncanny about it even. Our surroundings became gloomy, indescribably dreary and savage. We halted, there in the tracks of the thing and the angel, and looked about us, and we looked with a growing uneasiness and with an awe that sent a chill to the heart — at any rate, I know that it did to mine.

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"White and Long wanted to turn back. Clouds had fallen upon the summit of Rainier and were settling lower and lower. Viewed from a distance, they are clouds, but, when you find yourself in them, they are fog; and to find our way back in fog would be no easy matter. However, so I objected, it would be by no means impossible. There would be no danger, I said, if we were careful.

"'There is that pile of rocks,' I added, pointing ahead. 'Let's go on to that at any rate. The trail seems to lead straight towards those rocks. I hate to even think of turning back now, now when we are so near.'

"Still, I noted with some uneasiness, my companions hesitated, their minds, I suppose, a prey to feelings for which they could not have found a rational explanation. All this, however, really was not strange, for it was truly a wild and savage and awesome place and hour.

"At length, in an evil moment, we moved forward.

"Yes, soon there could be no doubt whatever about it: the trail led straight toward those rocks. What would we find there?

"So engrossed were we that we did not see it coming. There was a sudden exclamation, we halted, and there was the fog — the dreaded fog that we had forgotten — drifting about us. The next moment it was gone, but more was drifting after. We resumed our advance. It was not far now. Why couldn't the fog have waited a little longer? But what did it matter? It could affect but little our immediate purpose; and, though I knew that it would be difficult, surely we could find our way back to the camp.

"The fog thinned, and the rocks loomed up before us,

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dim and ghostly but close at hand. Then the vapor thickened about us again, and they were gone. We were in the midst of crevasses now and had to proceed with great caution. How it happened none of us knew; but of a sudden we saw that we had lost the trail. But we did not turn back to find it. It didn't matter, really. The demon and the angel had gone to those rocks. Of that we were certain. And there the rocks were, right there before us. 'Tis true we couldn't see them now, but they were there.

"We went on. Minutes passed. And still there were no rocks. At length we had to acknowledge it: in the twistings and turnings we had been compelled to make among those cursed crevasses, we had missed our objective, and now we knew not where we were.

"But we knew that we were not far. White and Long cursed and wanted to know how we were ever going to find our way back through this fog, since we had failed to find the rocks when they had been right there in front of us. But it was nothing really serious; we would find that rock-mass. We started. Of a sudden Long gave a sharp but low exclamation, and his hand clutched at my arm.

"'What is it?' I asked in a voice low and guarded.

"'*Voices!*' he whispered.

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Chapter 5

"DROME!"

WE LISTENED. NOT A SOUND. SUDdenly the glacier cracked and boomed, then silence again. We waited, listening. Still not the faintest sound. Long, so White and I decided, must have been deceived. But Long declared that he had not.

"'I heard voices, I tell you! I know that I was not mistaken at all. I heard voices.'

"Again we listened.

" 'There!' Long said suddenly. 'Hear them?'

"Yes, there, coming to us from out of the fog, were voices, plain, unmistakable, and yet at the same time — how shall I say it? — strangely muffled. Yes, that is the word, muffled. I wondered if the fog did that; but it couldn't, I decided, be the fog. One voice was silvery and strong, that of Skloko-yum's angel doubtless; the other deep and rough, the voice

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of a man. The woman (or girl) seemed to be urging something, pleading with him. Once we thought that there came a third voice, but we could not be sure of that. But of one thing we were sure: they were not speaking in English, in Spanish, French, Siwash or Chinook. And we felt certain, too, that it was not Scandinavian, German or Italian.

"'They are over there,' said Long, pointing. 'I am sure of it.'

"'No, there!' whispered White.

"For my part, I was convinced that these mysterious beings were in still a different direction!

"'Well,' I suggested, 'let's be moving. We won't get the solution of this queer business by standing here and wondering.'

"We got in motion, uncertain, though, whether we were really advancing in the right direction; but we could not, I thought, be greatly in error. Soon we came to a great crevasse. White leaped across it, and on that instant the voices ceased.

"Had they heard?

"We waited, White crouching there on the other side. Soon the sounds came again, whereupon White, in spite of my whispered remonstrance, began stealing forward. Long and I being less active, did not care to risk that jump, and so we made our way along the edge of the fissure, seeking a place to cross. This we were not long in finding, but by this time, to my profuond uneasiness, White had disappeared in the fog.

"We advanced cautiously, and as swiftly as possible. This, however, was not very swiftly. See! There it was, the

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ghostly loom of the rocks through the vapor. At that instant the voices ceased. Came a scream, a short, sharp scream from the woman. A cry from White, the crack of his revolver, and then that scream he gave — oh, the horror of that I can never forget. Long and I could not see him, or the others — only the ghostly rocks; and soon, too, they were disappearing, for the fog was growing denser.

"We heard the sound of a body striking the ice and knew that White had fallen. He was still screaming that piercing, blood-curdling scream. We struggled to reach him, but the crevasses, those damnable crevasses, held us up.

"The sound sank. Of a sudden it ceased.

"But there was no silence. The voice of the woman rang out sharp and clear. And I thought that I understood it: she was calling to it, to that thing we had seen, down at the camp, squatting beside her, its eyes burning with that demoniacal fire — *calling it off!*

"Came a short silence, broken by a cry of horror from the angel. The man's voice was heard, then her own in sudden, fierce, angry pleading; at any rate, so it seemed to me — that she was pleading with him again.

"But what had happened to White?

"All this time — which, indeed, was very brief — Long and I were struggling forward. When we got out of that fissured ice and reached the place of the tragedy, the surroundings were as still as death. There lay our companion stretched out on the blood-soaked ice, a gurgle and wheezing coming from his torn throat with his every gasp for breath.

"I knelt down beside him, while Long, poor fellow, stood

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staring about into the fog, his revolver in his hand. A single glance showed that there was no hope, that it was only a matter of moments.

"'Go!' gasped the dying man. 'It was Satan, the Fiend himself. And an angel. And the angel, she said:

"'"*Drome!*"

"'Yes, I heard her say it. She said:

"'"*Drome!*"'

"There was a shudder, and White was dead. And the fog drifted down denser than ever, and the stillness there was as the stillness of the grave."

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Chapter 6

AGAIN!

WHAT WAS THAT? THE ANGEL'S voice again, seeming to issue from the very heart of that mass of rocks. A loud cry and a succession of sharp cries — cries that, I thought, ended in a sobbing sound. Then silence. But no. What was that, that rustling, that flapping in the air?

"Long and I looked wildly — overhead, and then I knew a fear that sent an icy shudder into my heart.

"I cried out — probably it was a scream that I gave — and sprang backward. My soles were well calked, but this could not save me, and down I went flat on my back. The revolver was knocked from my hand and went sliding along the ice for many feet. I sprang up. At this instant the thing came driving down at Long.

"He fired, but he must have missed. The thing struck him

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in the throat and chest and drove him to the ice. I sprang for my weapon. Long screamed, screamed as White had done, and fought with the fury of a fiend. I got the revolver and started back. The thing had its teeth buried in Long's throat. So fierce was the struggle that I could not fire for fear lest I should hit my companion. As I came up, the monster loosened its hold and sprang high into the air, flapping its bat wings, then it came driving straight at me.

"I fired, but the bullet must have gone wild. Again, and it screamed and went struggling upward. I emptied my revolver, but I fear that I missed with every shot, except that second one. A few seconds, and that winged monster had disappeared.

"I turned to Long. I have seen some horrible sights in my time but never anything so horrible as what I saw now. For there was Long, my companion, my friend — there he was raised up on his hands, his arms rigid as steel, and the blood pouring from his throat. And I — I could only weep and watch him as he bled to death. But it did not last long. In Heaven's mercy, the horror was ended soon.

"And then — well, what followed is not very clear in my mind. I know that a madness seemed to come over me. But I did not flee from that place of mystery and death; the madness, if madness it was, was not like that. It was not of myself that I was thinking; it was not of escape. It was as though a bloody mist had fallen upon the place. Vengeance was what I wanted — vengeance and blood, vengeance and slaughter. I reloaded my revolver, picked up Long's and thrust it into my pocket, then caught up White's

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weapon with my left hand and started for the rocks, shouting defiance and curses as I went.

"I reached that pile of stone, found the tracks of the angel and the man and of that winged beast; but, at the edge of the rocks, the tracks vanished, and I could not follow farther. But I did not stop there. I went on, clear around that pile, and again and yet again. I climbed it, clear to the summit, searched everywhere; but I could not find a single trace of them I sought. Once, indeed, I thought that I heard a voice, the voice of the angel — thought that I heard that cursed word *Drome.*

"But I can not write any more now. Why, oh, why didn't we listen to Sklokoyum and keep away from this hellish mountain? That, of course, would have been foolish; but it would not have been this thing which will haunt me to my dying hour."

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Chapter 7

"AND NOW TELL ME!"

SCRANTON CLOSED THE JOURNAL, leaned back in his chair and looked questioningly at Milton Rhodes.

"There you are!" he said. "I told you that I was bringing you a mystery, and I trust that I have, at least in a great measure, met your expectations."

There was silence for a moment.

"Hellish mountain!" said Rhodes. "Hellish mountain! Noble old Rainier a hellish mountain!

"Pardon my soliloquy," he added suddenly, "And I want to thank you, Mr. Scranton, for bringing me a problem that, unless I am greatly in error, promises to be one of extraordinary scientific interest."

Extraordinary scientific interest! What on earth did he mean by that?

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"Still," he subjoined, "I must confess that there are some things about it that are very perplexing, and more than perplexing."

"I think I know what you mean. And that explains why the story has been kept a secret all these years."

"Your grandfather, Mr. Scranton, seems to have been a well-educated man."

"Yes; he was."

Milton Rhodes' pause was a significant one, but Scranton did not enlighten him further.

"On his return from Old He, did he tell just what had happened up there?"

"He did not, of course, care to tell everything, Mr. Rhodes, for fear he would not be believed. And little wonder. He was cautious, very guarded in his story; but, at that, not a single soul believed him. Perhaps, indeed, his very fear of distrust and suspicion and his consequent caution and vagueness, hastened and enhanced those dark and sinister thoughts and suspicions of his neighbors, and, indeed, of every one else who heard the story. There was talk of insanity, of murder even. This was the cruelest wound of all, and my grandfather carried the scar of it to his grave."

"Probably it would have been better," said Rhodes, "had he given them the whole of the story, down to the minutest detail."

"I do not see how. When they did not believe the little that he did tell, how on earth could they have believed the wild, the fantastic, the horrible thing itself?"

"Well, you may be right, Mr. Scranton. And here is a strange thing, too. It is inexplicable, a mystery indeed. For

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many years now, thousands of sightseers have every summer visited the mountain — this mountain that your grandfather found so mysterious, so hellish — and yet nothing has ever happened."

"That is true, Mr. Rhodes."

"They have found Rainier," said Milton Rhodes, "beautiful, majestic, a sight to delight the hearts of the gods; but no man has ever found anything having even the remotest resemblance to what your grandfather saw — has ever even found strange footprints in the snow. I ask you: where has the mystery been hiding all these years?"

"That is a question I shall not try to answer, Mr. Rhodes. It is my belief, however, that the mystery has never been *hiding* — using the word, that is, in its literal signification."

"Of course," Milton said. "But you know what I mean."

The other nodded.

"And now, Mr. Rhodes, I am going to tell you why I this day so suddenly found myself so anxious to come to you and give you this story."

Milton Rhodes leaned forward, and the look which he fixed on the face of Scranton was eager and keen.

"I believe, Mr. Rhodes, I at one point said enough to give you an idea of what —"

"Yes, yes!" Milton interrupted. "And now tell me!"

"The angel," said Scranton, "has come again!"

"Alone?"

"No; the demon is with her."

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Chapter 8

"DROME" AGAIN

CRANTON PRODUCED A CLIPPING from a newspaper.

"This," he told us, "is from today's noon edition of *The Herald.* The account, you observe, is a short one; but it is my belief that it will prove to have been (at any rate, the precursor of) the most extraordinary piece of news that this paper has ever printed."

He looked from one to the other of us as if challenging us to doubt it.

"What," asked Rhodes, "is it about?"

"The mysterious death (which the writer would have us believe was not mysterious at all) of Miss Rhoda Dillingham, daughter of the well-known landscape painter, on the Cowlitz Glacier, *at the Tamahnowis Rocks,* on the afternoon of Wednesday last."

"Mysterious?" queried Milton Rhodes. "I remember reading a short account of the girl's death. There was, however, nothing to indicate that there had been anything at all myster-

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ious about the tragedy. Nor was there any mention of the Tamahnowis Rocks even. It said only that she had been killed, by a fall, on the Cowlitz Glacier."

"But there *was* something mysterious, Mr. Rhodes, how mysterious no one seems to even dream. For again we have it, that word which White heard the angel speak — that awful word Drome."

"Drome!" Milton Rhodes exclaimed. "That word again — after all these years?"

"Yes," said Scranton. "And you will understand the full and fearful meaning of what has just happened there on Mount Rainier when I tell you that knowledge of that mysterious word has always been held an utter secret by the Scrantons. No living man but myself knew it, and yet there it is again."

"This is becoming interesting indeed!" exclaimed Milton Rhodes.

"I was sure that you would find it so. And now permit me to read to you what the newspaper has to say about this poor girl's death."

He held the clipping up to get a better light upon it and read the following:

"The death of Miss Rhoda Dillingham, daughter of Francis Dillingham, the well-known painter of mountain scenery, on the Cowlitz Glacier on the afternoon of last Wednesday, was, it has now been definitely ascertained, a purely accidental one. Victor Boileau, the veteran Swiss guide, has shown that there is not the slightest foundation for the wild, fantastic rumors that began to be heard just after the girl's death. Boileau's visit to the Tamahnowis Rocks, the scene of the tragedy, and

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his careful examination of the place, have proved that the victim came to her death by a fall from the rocks.

"There was no witness to the tragedy itself. Francis Dillingham, the father of the unfortunate girl, was on another part of the rocks at the time, sketching. On hearing the screams, he rushed to his daughter. He found her lying on the ice at the foot of the rock, and on the point of expiring. She spoke but once, and this was to utter these enigmatic words:

"'Drome! She said, "Drome!"'

"This is one of those features which gave rise to the stories that something uncanny and mysterious had occurred at the Tamahnowis Rocks, as if the spot, indeed, was justifying its eerie name.

"Another is that Dillingham declared that he himself, as he made his way over the rocks in answer to his daughter's screams, heard another voice, an unknown voice, and that he is sure that he distinctly heard that voice pronounce that strange word Drome.

"Victor Boileau, however, has shown that there had been no third person there at the occurrence of the tragedy, that Rhoda Dillingham's death was wholly accidental, that it was caused by a fall, from a height of about thirty feet, down the broken and precipitous face of the rocky mass.

"Another feature much stressed by those who see a mystery in everything connected with this tragic accident was the cruel wound in the throat of the victim. The throat, it is said, had every appearance of having been torn by teeth; but it is now known that the wound was made by some sharp, jagged point of rock, struck by the girl during her fall."

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Chapter 9

"TO MY DYING HOUR"

SCRANTON FOLDED THE CLIPPING and placed it between leaves of the journal.

"There!" he said. "My story is ended. You have all the principal facts now. Additional details may be found in this old record — if you are interested in the case and care to peruse it."

Milton Rhodes reached forth a hand for the battered old journal.

"I am indeed interested," he said. "And I wish to thank you again, Mr. Scranton, for bringing to me a problem that promises to be one of extraordinary scientific interest."

"I suppose that you will visit the mountain, the Tamah-nowis Rocks, as soon as possible."

Milton Rhodes nodded.

"It will take some time, some hours, that is, to make the

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necessary preparations; for this journey, I fancy, is going to prove a very strange one and perhaps a very terrible one, too. But tomorrow evening, I trust, will find us at Paradise. If so, on the following morning, we will be at the Tamahnowis Rocks."

"We?" queried Scranton.

"Yes; my friend Carter here is going along. Indeed, without Bill at my side, I don't know that I would care to face this thing."

"Me?" I exclaimed. "Where did you get that? I didn't say that I was going."

"That is true, Bill," Milton laughed; "you didn't say that you were going."

A silence ensued, during which Scranton sat in deep thought, as, indeed, did Milton Rhodes and myself. What did it all mean? Oh, what was I to make of this wild, this fantastic, this fearful thing?

"There is no necessity," Scranton said suddenly, "for the warning, I know; and yet I can't help pointing out that this adventure that you are about to enter upon may prove a very dangerous, even a very horrible one."

"Yes," Rhodes nodded; "it may prove a very dangerous, a very horrible adventure indeed."

"Why," I exclaimed, "all this cabalistic lingo and all this mystery? Why not be explicit? There is only one place that the angel could possibly have come from, this wonderful and terrible creature that says Drome and has a demon for her companion."

"Yes, Bill," Milton nodded; "there is only one place. And it was from that very place that she and her demon came."

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"Good Heaven! Why, that supposition is absurd. The thing's preposterous."

"Do you think so, Bill? The submarine, the airplane, the radio — all were absurd, all were preposterous, Bill, until men got them. And many other things, too. Why, it was only yesterday that the sphericity of this old world that we inhabit ceased to be absurd, ceased to be preposterous. Don't be too sure, old *tillicum.* Remember the oft-repeated observation of Hamlet:

"'There are more things in heaven *and earth,* Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.'"

"That is true enough. But this is different. This isn't philosophy or something in philosophy. This —"

"Awaits us!" said Milton Rhodes. "The question of prime importance to us now is if we can find the way to that place whence the angel and the demon came; for, so it seems to me, there can be little doubt that it is only on rare occasions, on very rare occasions, that these strange beings appear on the mountain."

"It is," Scranton remarked, "as, of course, you know, against the rules to take any firearm into the Park; but, if I were you, I should never start upon this enterprise without weapons."

"You may rest assured on that point," Milton told him: "we will be armed. The hazardous possibilities of this very strange problem that we are going to endeavor to solve justifies this infraction of the rule."

"Well," said Scranton, suddenly rising from his chair, "you are doubtless anxious to start your preparations at once, and I am keeping you from them. There is one thing, though, Mr. Rhodes, that I, that — "

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He paused, and a look of trouble, of distress settled upon his pale, pinched features.

"What is it?" Milton Rhodes queried.

"I am glad that you are going, and yet — and yet I may regret this day, this visit, to my dying hour. For the thing that I have brought you is dangerous. It is more than that; it is awful."

"And probably," said Milton, "it is very wonderful indeed."

"But," Scranton added, "one should not blink the possibility that —"

"Tut, tut, man!" Milton Rhodes exclaimed, laughing. "We mustn't find you a bird of ill-omen now. You mustn't think things like that."

"Yet I can't help thinking about them, Mr. Rhodes. I wish that I could accompany you, at least as far as the scene of the tragedies; but I am far from strong. Even to drive a car sometimes taxes my strength. I doubt if I could now make the climb even from the Inn as far as Sluiskin Falls."

A silence fell, to be suddenly broken by Milton.

"Let us regard *that* as a happy augury," said he, pointing towards the southern windows, through which the sunlight, bright and sparkling, came streaming in: "the gloom and the storm have passed away, and all is bright once more."

"I pray Heaven that *it* prove so!" the other exclaimed.

"For my part, I shall always be glad that you came to me, Mr. Scranton; glad always, even — even," said Milton Rhodes, "if I never come back."

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Chapter 10

ON THE MOUNTAIN

IT WAS A FEW MINUTES PAST three on the afternoon of the day following when Milton Rhodes and I got into his automobile and started for Mount Rainier. When we arrived at the Park entrance, which we did about half-past six, the speedometer showed a run of one hundred and two miles.

"Any firearms, a cat or a dog in that car?" was the question when Milton went over to register.

"Nope," said Milton.

There was a revolver in one of his pockets, however, and another in one of mine. But there was no weapon in the car: hadn't I got out of the car so that there wouldn't be?

A few moments, and we were under way again, the road, which ran through primeval forest, a narrow one now, sinuous and, it must be confessed, hardly as smooth as glass.

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Soon we crossed Tahoma Creek, where we had a glimpse of the mountain, its snowy, rocky heights aglow with a wonderful golden tint in the rays of the setting sun. Strange, wild, fantastic thoughts and fears came to me again, and upon my mind settled gloomy foreboding — sinister, nameless, foreboding terrible as a pall. We were drawing near the great mountain now, with its unutterable cosmic grandeur and loneliness, near to its unknown, which Milton Rhodes and I were perhaps fated to know soon and perhaps to know to our sorrow.

From these gloomy, disturbing thoughts, which yet had a strange fascination too, I was at length aroused by the voice of Rhodes.

"Kautz Creek," said he.

And the next moment we shot across the stream, which went racing and growling over its boulders, the pale chocolate hue of its water advertising its glacial origin.

"Up about two thousand four hundred feet now," Milton added. "Longmire Springs next. I say, Bill, I wonder where we shall be this time tomorrow, eh?"

"Goodness knows. Sometimes I find myself wondering if the whole thing isn't pure moonshine, a dream. An angel and a demon on the slopes of Mount Rainier! And they say that this is the Twentieth Century!"

Rhodes smiled wanly.

"I think that you will find the thing real enough, Billy, me lad," said he.

"Too real, maybe. The fact is that I don't know what on earth to think."

"The only thing to do is to wait, Bill. And we won't have to wait long, either."

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When we swung to the grade out of Longmire, I thought that we were at last beginning the real climb to the mountain. But Milton said no.

"When we reach the Van Trump auto park, then we'll start up," said he.

And we did — the road turning and twisting up a forest-clad steep. Then, its sinuosities behind us, it ran along in a comparatively straight line, ascending all the time, to Christine Falls and to the crossing of the Nisqually, the latter just below the end of the glacier — snout, as they call it. Yes, there it was, the great wall of ice, four or five hundred feet in height, looking, however, what with the earth and boulders ground into it, more like a mass of rock than like ice. There it was, the first glacier I ever had seen, the first living glacier, indeed, ever discovered in all these United States — at any rate, the first one ever reported. Elevation four thousand feet.

The bridge behind us, we swung sharp to the right and went slanting up a steep rampart of rock, moving now away from the glacier, away from the mountain; in other words, we were heading straight for Longmire but climbing, climbing. At length the road, cut in the precipitous rock, narrowed to the width of but a single auto; and at this point we halted, for descending cars had the way.

The view here was a striking one indeed, down the Nisqually Valley and over its flanking, tumbled mountains, and the scene would probably have been even more striking than I found it had the spot not been one to make the head swim. I had the out side of the auto, and I could look right over the edge, over the edge and down the precipitous wall of rock to the bed of the Nisqually, half a thousand feet below.

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The last car rolled by, and we got the signal to come on. This narrow part of the road passed, we swung in from the edge of the rampart, and I confess that I was not at all sorry that we did so.

Silver Forest, Frog Heaven, Narada Falls, Inspiration Point, then Paradise Valley, with its strange tree-forms, its beautiful flower-meadows, and, in the distance, the Inn on its commanding height, five thousand five hundred feet above the level of the sea; and, filling all the background, the great mountain itself, towering fourteen thousand four hundred feet aloft; the end of our journey in sight at last!

The end? Yes — until tomorrow. And then what? The beginning then — the beginning of what would, in all likelihood, prove an adventure as hazardous as it was strange, a most fearful quest.

Had I been a believer in the oneirocritical science, the things that I dreamed that night would have ended the enterprise (as far as I was concerned) then and there: in the morning I would have started for Seattle instanter. But I was not, and I am not now; and yet often I wonder why I dreamed some of those terrible things — those things which came true.

And, through all the horror, a cowled thing, a figure with bat wings, hovered or glided in the shadows of the background and at intervals, in tones cavernous and sepulchral, gave utterance to that dreaded name:

"Drome!"

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Chapter 11

THE TAMAHNOWIS ROCKS

IT WAS VERY EARLY — IN FACT, the first rays of the sun, not yet risen, had just touched the lofty heights of Rainier — when Rhodes and I left the Inn.

Besides our revolvers and a goodly supply of ammunition, there were the lights, an aneroid, a thermometer, our canteens, ice-picks; two pieces of light but very strong rope, each seventy-five feet in length; our knives, like those which hunters carry; and food sufficient to last us *a week*.

Yes, and there were the ice-creepers, which we should need in making our way over the glaciers, the Paradise and the Cowlitz, to that mass of rock, the scene of those mysterious tragedies.

We did not take the direct trail up but went over to the edge of the cañon that I — for this was my first visit to Mount Rainier — might see the Nisqually Glacier.

And, as we made our way upward through the brightening scene, as I gazed upon the grim cosmic beauty all about me,

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up into the great cirque of the Nisqually, up to the broad summit of the mountain and (in the opposite direction) out over the Tatoosh Range to distant Mount Adams and Mount St. Helens all violet and gold in the morning sun — well, that strange story which had brought us here then took on the seeming of a mirage or a dream.

"The mountain," said Milton Rhodes, as we stood leaning on our alpenstocks during one of our halts, "once rose to a height of sixteen thousand feet or more. The dip of the lava layers shows that. The whole top was blown clean off."

"Must have been some real fireworks," was my comment, "when that happened."

"See that line of bare rock there on the very summit, Bill, midway between Point Success up here on the left and Gibralter here on the right?"

"I noticed that," I told him, "and was wondering about it. Why isn't there any snow there?"

"Heat, Bill," said Rhodes. "Heat."

"Heat! Great Vesuvius, I thought that Mount Rainier was a dead volcano."

"Not dead, Bill. Only slumbering. Four eruptions are on record.* Whether Old He is to die in his slumber, or

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*"At this time (November, 1843) two of the great snowy cones, Mount Regnier and St. Helens, were in action. On the 23rd of the preceding November, St. Helens had scattered its ashes, like a white fall of snow, over the Dalles of the Columbia, 50 miles distant. A specimen of these ashes was given to me by Mr. Brewer, one of the clergymen at the Dalles."—Fremont.

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whether he is one day to awake in mad fury — that, of course, no man can tell us."

"To see it belching forth smoke and sending down streams of lava would be an interesting sight certainly," said I. "And I wonder what effect that would have on this Drome business — that is, if there is any such thing as Drome at all."

"Drome!" Milton echoed.

For some moments he stood there with a strange look of abstraction upon his face.

"Drome! Ah, Bill," said he, "I wish that I knew what it means. But come, we'll never reach the Tamahnowis Rocks if we stand here wondering."

And so we resumed our climb. We were the early birds this morning; not a living soul was to be seen anywhere on the mountain. But hark! What was that? Somebody whistling somewhere up there and off to the right. The whistles came in rapid succession, and they were loud and clear and ringing. I stopped and looked but could see nothing.

I should have explained that we had turned aside from the edge of the cañon, had crossed that little stream mentioned by grandfather Scranton and had begun to climb that steep rocky mass that he spoke of.

"What the deuce," said I, "is that fellow whistling like that for? It can't be to us."

"That," Milton Rhodes smiled, "isn't a man, Bill."

"Not a man?"

"It's a marmot," Milton told me.

"A marmot? Well," said I, "we live and we learn. I could have sworn, Milton, that it was a human being."

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The ascent was a steep one, and we climbed in silence. The horse-trail, coming from the left, goes slanting and then twisting its way up this rocky rampart. On reaching the path, we paused for some moments to get our breath, then plodded on.

"I was thinking," said Milton Rhodes at last, "of what Francis Parkman said."

"What did he say?"

"'I would go farther for one look into the crater of Vesuvius than to see all the ruined temple in Italy.'"

"I wonder," I returned, "how far we shall have to go to see that angel that says Drome, not to mention her pretty demon."

Rhodes laughed.

"We are getting there, Bill; we're getting there— near the scene of the tragedies at any rate."

Ere long we reached the top. Here we passed the last shrub and in a little space came to a small glacier. The tracks of the horses led straight across it. But our route did not go thither; it led up over the rocks.

Suddenly, as we toiled our way upward, Rhodes, with the remark that Science had some strange stories to tell, asked me if I had ever heard of Tartaglia's *slates*. I never had, though I had heard of Tartaglia, and I wanted to know about those slates.

"Tombstones," said Milton.

"Tombstones?"

"Tombstones, Bill. What with the terrible poverty, Tartaglia, when educating himself, could not get even a slate, and so he went out and wrote his exercises on tombstones."

"Gosh!"

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"And did you ever hear of Demoivre's death? There is a problem for your psychological sharks."

"I never heard of him. And how did the gentleman die?"

"He told them that he had to sleep so many minutes longer each day."

"And did he do it?"

"That's what he did, Bill."

"And," I asked with growing curiosity, "when he had slept through the twenty-four hours? Then what?"

"He never woke up," said Milton Rhodes.

Then he told me that queer story about Isaac Barrow, or, rather, about his father. When sent to school, at Charterhouse, young Barrow raised the very deuce and raised it high; so much deuce, in fact, that dad Barrow, whilst praying, said that, if it should be the Divine pleasure to take from him any of his children, he could best stand the loss of Isaac.

And did I know what the heart of a man does when his head is cut off? I (who was wondering at his sudden turn to these queer scientific matters) said I supposed that the heart stops beating. But Milton Rhodes said no; the organ continues its pulsations for an hour or longer.

And had I heard of Spallanzani's very curious experiment with the crow? I never had, but I wanted to. Spallanzani, Milton told me, gave a crow a good feed and then chopped its head off. (That decapitation didn't surprise me any, for I knew that Spallanzani was a real scientist.) The body was placed in a temperature the same as that of the living bird and kept there for six hours. Spallanzani then took the body out, opened it and found that the food which he had given the bird was thoroughly digested.

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"These scientists," was my comment, "are queer birds themselves."

Then he told me some strange things about sympathetic vibrations — that a drinking-glass can be smashed by the human voice (I knew that) that an alpine avalanche can be started thundering down by the tinkle of a bell; and so, as Tyndall tells us, the muleteers in the Swiss mountains silence the bells of their animals when in proximity to such danger. And he told me of that musician who came near destroying the Colebrook Dale suspension bridge *with his fiddle.**

Then came the strangest thing of all — the story of Vogt's cricket. The professor severed the body of a cricket (a living cricket, of course) into two pieces, and the fore part then turned round and *ate up the hinder!*

"Yes," Milton Rhodes said, "Science has some queer stories to tell."

"I should say that she has!"

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*"When the bridge at Colebrook Dale (the first iron bridge in the world) was building, a fiddler came along and said to the workmen that he could fiddle their bridge down. The builders thought this boast a fiddle-de-dee, and invited the itinerant musician to fiddle away to his heart's content. One note after another was struck upon the strings until one was found with which the bridge was in sympathy. When the bridge began to shake violently, the incredulous workmen were alarmed at the unexpected result, and ordered the fiddler to stop."—Prof. J. Lovering.

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"And maybe," he added, "she'll have a stranger one than ever to tell when we get back — that is, if we ever do."

We passed McClure's Rock, height about seven thousand four hundred feet; made our way along the head of a small glacier, which fell away towards the Nisqually; ascended the cleaver, at this point very low and along the base of which we had been moving; and there, on the other side and coming up within a few yards of the spot where we stood, was the Paradise Glacier, white and beautiful in the sunlight.

Milton Rhodes gave me an inquiring look.

"Recognize this spot?" he queried.

"I never saw it before, of course; but, yes, I believe that I do: this is the place where the angel and the demon crossed over, the spot where Scranton, White and Long found the tracks again."

"This is the place."

"And where," I asked, "are the Tamahnowis Rocks?"

"Can't see them from here, Bill. They're right over there, half a mile distant or so, probably three-quarters."

He moved down to the edge of the snow and ice; I followed.

"Now for the creepers," said Milton, seating himself on a rock-fragment. "Then we are off."

A few moments, and we had fastened on the toothed soles of steel and were under way again.

Suddenly Rhodes, who was leading, stopped, raised his alpenstock and pointed with it.

"There they are, Bill!"

And there they were. The Rocks of Tamahnowis — the Spirit, the Demon Rocks — in sight at last.

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Chapter 12

WE ENTER THEIR SHADOW

FOR A SPACE WE STOOD THERE IN silence looking at that dark mass which reared itself up, like a temple in ruins I thought, in the midst of the crevassed ice.

Then I said:

"Who, looking at that pile, would ever dream that there was anything mysterious and terrible about it, anything *scientific?*"

"The place, "Milton Rhodes returned, "certainly has an innocent look; but looks, you know, are often deceiving. And how deceiving in this particular instance, that we know full well indeed. Besides Scranton, yourself and me, not a living soul knows how horrible was the death of that poor girl."

I made no response. Many were the thoughts that came and went as I stood there and looked at those Tamahnowis Rocks.

Of a sudden I noticed a slight smile in the eyes of my companion.

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"Why the grin?" I queried. "This, I must say, is a sweet time for grins. I would suggest that, instead, you say your prayers."

Rhodes laughed. Then he pointed to my right hand. This, I now discovered, was resting on that pocket which held my revolver.

"I see," he said, "that you have your artillery very handy."

"Yes; and I notice that you have, too."

"I wish that I could have it even more so, Bill.

'You know, old *tillicum*," he added, his brows contracting and a shadow seeming to pass athwart his face and then to return and linger there, "maybe I'll wish that I hadn't dragged you into this wild, unearthly business. And yet I wouldn't care to face it without you beside me."

"*Dragged* me into it?" I exclaimed. "Now, look here: please, Milton, don't say that again."

"I hope, Bill, that I haven't —"

"Not a bit, not a bit. But I hope you will never talk like that any more."

He raised a hand and placed it on my shoulder.

"Pardon me, old *tillicum*," he said. "And yet, after all, I may regret it, for this business before us may prove a most terrible one — something even worse than that."

For a few moments there was silence, and then I said:

"Well, let's *klatawah*."

"Yes," said he, turning and starting; "let's *klatawah*.

"And," he added, "do you know what that reminds me of?"

"I wonder."

"Of Sluiskin's appeal to Stevens and Van Trump, down there at the falls that now bear his name:

"'Wake klatawah! Wake klatawah!'"

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"But," said I, "they went, and they *came back*. That's an augury."

"But," he answered, "if it hadn't been for those steam-caves up there in the crater, they might not have come back, might have perished on the summit that night in the bitter cold. And then the Siwash would have been a true prophet."

"Well, there may be something equivalent to those steam-caves somewhere in the place that we are going to. I don't mean, of course, *in* that pile of rock over there."

"Of course not. But that isn't what's troubling me; it's the possibility that we may be too late."

"Too late?" I exclaimed.

"Just so. It is only at long intervals — so far as we know, that is — that these strange beings appear on the mountain."

"Well?" I queried.

"Well, Bill, glaciers, you know, move."

"I know that. But what on earth has the movement of the ice to do with the appearance of this angel on Mount Rainier?"

But Milton wouldn't tell me that. Instead, he told me to think. Think? I did. I thought hard; but I couldn't see it. However, we were drawing close to the rocks now, and soon I would have the answer. I felt that pocket again. Yes, the revolver was still there!

"Look here!" said I suddenly.

Milton Rhodes, who was on the point of springing across a fissure, turned and looked.

"How does this come?" I wanted to know. "I thought that the Tamahnowis Rocks were on the Cowlitz Glacier?"

"This is the Cowlitz, Bill."

"But we haven't left the Paradise yet."

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"Oh, yes, we have. There is no cleaver between them, no anything; at this place it is all one continuous sheet of ice."

"Oh, that's it. Well, the ice is pretty badly crevassed before us. Glad it isn't all like this."

We worked our way forward, twisting and turning. Slowly but steadily we advanced, drawing near and nearer to that dark, frowning, broken mass, wondering (at any rate, I was) about the secrets that we should find there — unless, indeed, we were too late. What had Milton meant by that? How on earth could the apparition of the angel and the demon be in any manner contingent upon the movement of the ice?

Well, we were very near now; we were so near, in fact, that, if there was any one, any *thing* lurking there in the rocks, human-or monster (or both) he or it could hear us.

We would soon know whether we had come too late.

Ere long we had got over the fissures and were moving over ice unbroken and smooth. I wondered if this was the spot where, so many years ago, White and Long had been killed. But I did not voice that thought. The truth is that this terrible place held me silent. And, when we moved into the shadow cast by the broken, towering pile, the scene became more weird and terrible than ever.

A few moments, and we halted, so close to the rocky wall, precipitous and broken, that I could have touched it with outstretched hand.

How cold it seemed here, how strange that sinister quality (or was it only my imagination?) of the enveloping shadows!

"Well," said Milton Rhodes, and I noticed that his voice was low and guarded, "here we are."

I made no response.

The silence there was as the silence of a tomb.

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Chapter 13

"I THOUGHT I HEARD SOMETHING"

"WHAT," I ASKED, "IS THE FIRST thing to do now?"

"Find the spot where Rhoda Dillingham was killed. The snowfall of the day before yesterday covered the stains, of course. I feel confident, however, what with the description that Victor Boileau gave me, that I shall recognize the spot the moment I see it. It's over there on the other side, Bill, in the sunlight."

"Why that precise spot?"

"Because I hope to find something there — something that Victor Boileau himself didn't see."

A cold shiver went through my heart. We were so near now. Yes, so near; but near to what? Or had we come too late?

"Now for it, Bill!" said Milton Rhodes.

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He turned and began to work his way down along the base of the rock-wall. The ice now sloped steeply, and, from there to the end of the frowning mass of rocks, and for some distance beyond it, the glacier was fissured and split in all directions. The going was really difficult. Had we tried it without the creepers, we should have broken our necks. One consolation was that the distance was a short one. Why on earth had the artist brought his daughter to this awful place?

But, then, there had been nothing terrible about the scene to Dillingham, until the tragedy. As for the appearance of the rocks — yes, I had to acknowledge that — there was nothing intrinsically terrible about it: it was what one *knew* that made it so. Its sinister, its awful seeming would not have been there had I not known what had happened.

We made our way around the end of the rocky pile into the glare of the sunlight and started up the crevassed and split surface there. The slope, however, was not near so steep as the one we had descended on the other side. Sixty feet, and Rhodes stopped and said, looking eagerly, keenly this way and that:

"This is the place, Bill. There can be no mistake. Here are the two big crevasses that Boileau described. Yes, it was in this very spot, ten or twelve feet from the base of the wall, that the girl lay when her father came — lay dying, that terrible wound in her throat."

He began to scrape the snow away with his steel-soled shoes. A few moments, and he paused and pointed. I shuddered as I saw that stain he had uncovered.

"There. You see, Bill?"

"I see. Cover it up."

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I ran my eyes along the base of the rocks; I searched every spot that the eye could reach on the face or in the shadowy recesses of the dark, broken mass, towering there high above us; I looked all around at the fissured ice: but there was nothing unusual to be seen anywhere.

"Where," I asked, and my tones were low and guarded, "did the angel, if the angel was here — where, Milton, could the angel and the demon have vanished so suddenly and without leaving a single trace?"

"There lies our problem, Bill. A very few minutes should find us in possession of the answer — if, that is, we have not come too late. As to the vanishing without leaving a single trace behind them, that no trace was found is by no means tantamount to saying that they left none."

"I know that. But where did they go?"

"Let us," said Rhodes, "see if we can discover the answer."

"I don't think," I observed, "that they could have gone *right into* the rocks: either Dillingham, as he made his way here to the girl, would have seen them, or Boileau would have found the *entrance* to the way that they took."

"At any rate," Rhodes answered, "we may take that, for the moment, as a working hypothesis, and so we will turn our attention now to another quarter. If we fail there — though, remember, ice *moves,* Bill — we will then give these rocks a complete and careful examination with the object of settling the question whether the great Boileau really did see everything that is to be found here."

"And so —" I began.

"And so?" he queried.

"Then they — or it — disappeared by way of the ice."

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"Precisely," Rhodes nodded: "by way of the ice. And now you see what I meant when I reminded you that the ice here moves."

"Yes; I believe that I do, at last. Great Heaven, Milton, what can this thing mean?"

"That is for us to seek to discover. And so we will give our attention to these crevasses."

He moved to the edge of one of those big fissures that I have mentioned, the upper one, and peered down into the bluish depths of it. I followed and stood beside him.

"It couldn't have been into this one," he said.

"Impossible," I told him.

He moved along the edge of the crevasse, in the direction of the rocks. I went along after him, my right hand near that pocket which held my revolver.

"And," thought I bitterly to myself, "this is the Twentieth Century!"

"They could," said Rhodes at length, stopping within a few yards of the wall of rock, "have gone into the crevasse at this point. Yes, most certainly they could have done so."

"But where could they have gone to? There is no break in the wall here, not even a crack."

"Don't forget, Bill, that ice moves."

"If *that* is the explanatnion, we shall go back no wiser than when we came."

"Let us hope," he returned, "that it doesn't prove the explanation. I have no knowledge as to the rate of the ice-movement here. The Nisqually moves a foot or more a day in summer. The movement here may be very similar, though, on the other hand, there are certain considerations which

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suggest the possibility that it may be only a few inches per diem."

"It may be so."

"However, Bill, this speculation or surmise will avail us nothing now. So let's give our attention to this other crevasse. And, if it too should reveal nothing — well, there are plenty of others."

"Yes," said I rather dubiously; "there are plenty of others."

"The unusual size of these two," he went on, "and this being the scene of the tragedy led me to think that it would not be a bad idea to start the examination at this point. The great Boileau — and I learned this with not a little satisfaction, Bill, though I may say 'twas with no colossal surprise —the great Boileau did not give even the slightest attention to any crevasse. He knew before ever he came up here, of course, that the girl's death had been a purely accidental one.

"However, let us see what we are to find in this other fissure."

We found it even wider than the one which we had just quitted. And scarcely had we come to a pause there on the edge of it, and within a few yards of the rock, when I started and gave a low exclamation for silence.

For some moments we stood listening intently, but all was silent, save for the low, ghostly whisper of the mountain wind.

"What was it?" Rhodes asked in a low voice.

"I don't know. It may have been nothing, of course. But I certainly thought I heard something."

"Where?"

"I can't say. It seemed to come from out of the rock itself or — from this."

And I indicated the crevasse at our feet.

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Chapter 14

THE WAY TO DROME

THE DEPTH OF THE FISSURE WAS here twelve or fifteen feet. A short distance out, however, it narrowed, and at that point it was almost completely filled with snow. I noticed even then, in that moment of tense uncertainty, that it would be very easy for a person to make his way down that snow to the bottom. A few steps then, and he would be at the real base of that wall of rock. Yes, *that* would explain it!

A strange excitement possessed me, though I endeavored to suppress every sign of it. Yes, the angel and the demon — if the angel had been out upon the ice at the moment of the tragedy — could have disappeared easily enough. 'Tis true, no tracks had been noticed there. That, however, was no proof positive that there had been none. And perhaps, forsooth, there had been no tracks there to discover. The angel might not have been out upon the glacier at all, and the thing might not have left a single mark in the snow. It could have disappeared without doing that. For I knew what had killed poor Rhoda Dillingham.

Supposing, however, that this was indeed the secret, what then? A great deal was explained, but as much remained

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inexplicable. For where on earth, after reaching the bottom of the crevasse, could the angel and the demon have gone? There was, so far as I could see, no possible way of escape. There was a remarkable overhang of rock there at the end, coming down within a yard or so of the floor. But that was all it was, an overhang. It was not the entrance to any subterranean passage.

Perhaps, if this was indeed the way, we had come too late; perhaps there had been an opening there, an opening that, what with the movement of the ice, was now wholly concealed.

I looked at Milton Rhodes, and on the instant I knew that he too had been noticing all these things. Had the same thoughts come to him also?

"Everything is still now," I observed. "That sound might have been only a fancy."

He nodded slowly.

"Or it might have been made by the glacier. No telling, though, Bill. It might have been real enough and something else. We mustn't forget that for one moment."

"I am not likely to do so. However, what do you make of this?"

"It may be the way to — the way to Drome. And it may, of course, be nothing of the kind. They easily could have vanished into this crevasse."

"And then where could they have gone?"

"Probably the way is blocked by the ice now. Who can say? That overhang down there—"

"Is not an entrance," I told him.

"There may, however, Bill, be something there. It will take us only a moment to find that out."

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He turned forthwith and moved along the edge to that spot where the fissure narrowed and it was filled with snow. I followed. A few moments, and we stood at the bottom.

"Great Heaven!" said I as we moved along between those walls of ice.

"What is it, Bill?" queried Milton, pausing and looking back at me.

"Suppose this ice-mass here above were to slip! We'd be flattened between these walls like pancakes!"

Rhodes smiled a little and said he *guessed* we'd be like pancakes all right if that happened. The next moment we were moving forward again, our steel soles grating harshly, though not loudly, upon the glacier-polished bottom.

"You see," said I as we drew near to the end, "the way to Drome does not lie here. Under that overhang there is nothing but rock. There is not even a crack, to say nothing of an entrance."

"It certainly looks like it, Bill. However, it will do no harm to make an examination. That there *is* an entrance we know. And, if it isn't here — well, then it must be some place else. And, unless we are too late, we'll search these Rocks of Tamahnowis until we find it."

A few steps, and Rhodes halted, his left hand resting against the rock. He stooped to peer under. I exclaimed and involuntarily seized him by the sleeve.

"There it is again!"

He straightened up, and we stood in an attitude of riveted attention. The place, however, was as silent as the grave.

"I know that I heard something," I told him.

"Yes; I heard it that time, too," said Milton Rhodes. "Where did it come from?"

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I shook my head.

"Maybe one of the sounds that the glacier makes," he proffered.

"It is possible. But—"

"Well?"

"It seemed to come right out of the rocks; but that isn't possible."

"We'll see about that, Bill."

He pressed a button, and the strong rays of his electric light played upon the dark rock and the blue ice. The light in his left hand, he dropped to his knees and looked under. I heard an exclamation and saw him move forward. At that instant a sound brought me up and whirled me around.

My heart was in my throat. I could have sworn that the sound had issued from some point just behind me. But there was nothing to be seen there — only the walls of blue ice and the blue sky above.

"Must have been some sound made by the glacier slipping or something," I told myself.

I turned — to find that Milton Rhodes had vanished!

For a little space I stood staring and wondering, then called in a low voice:

"Milton. Oh, Milton."

No answer.

"Milton."

Silence still.

"Milton," I called once more. "Where are you?"

The answer was a scream, a scream that threatened to arrest the coursing blood in my veins — the sound seeming to issue from the very heart of the rock-mass there before me.

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Chapter 15

THE ANGEL

THE SCREAM CEASED AS SUDDENLY as it had come. I drew my revolver, snapped on the electric light, and, stooping low, looked into that spot where, a few moments before, Milton Rhodes had so suddenly and mysteriously disappeared.

Nothing but the unbroken rock before me. And yet Rhodes had vanished. I turned the light full upon the low roof, and then I exclaimed aloud: the entrance was there!

I dropped to my hands and knees and moved under, the pack not a little impeding my movements. An instant, and I was standing upright peering into a high, narrow tunnel, which some convulsion of nature, in some lost age of the earth, had rent right through the living rock.

Nothing was to be seen, save the broken walls, floor and roof, deep, eerie shadows crawling and gliding as the light moved. The view, however, was a very restricted one, for the gallery, which sloped gently upward, gave a sudden turn

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at a distance of only thirty feet or so. What awaited me somewhere beyond that turn?

For a few moments I listened intently. Not the faintest sound — nothing but the loud beating of my heart. What had happened to Rhodes?

"Milton!" I called softly. "Oh, Milton!"

No answer came.

I grasped a projection of rock, drew myself up into the tunnel and advanced as rapidly and silently as possible, the light and the alpenstock in my left hand, the revolver in the right. But it was not very silently, what with the creepers. At times they grated harshly; it was as if spirit-things were mocking me with suppressed, demoniacal laughter. Yet I could not pause to remove those grating shoes of toothed steel. Every second even might be precious now.

I drew near the turn, the revolver thrust forward in readiness for instant action.

I reached it, and there just beyond, a dark figure was standing, framed in a blaze of light.

It was Milton Rhodes.

He turned his head, and I saw a smile move athwart his features.

"Well, we've found it, Bill!" said he.

I was drawing near to him.

"That scream?' I said. "Who gave that terrible scream?"

"Terrible? It didn't sound terrible to me," smiled Milton Rhodes. "Fact is, Bill, I'd like to hear it again."

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"'Tis so."

"Who was it? Or what was it?"

"Why, the angel herself!" he told me.

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"Where is she now?"

"Gone, Bill; she's gone. When she saw me, she fetched up, gave that scream, then turned and vanished — around that next turn."

"What is she like, Milton?"

"I wish that I could tell you! But how can a man describe Venus? I know one thing, Bill: if all the daughters of Drome are as fair as this one that I saw, I know where all the movie queens of the future are coming from."

"I looked at him, and I laughed.

"Wait till you see her, Bill. Complexion like alabaster, white as Rainier's purest snow! And hair! Oh, that hair, Bill! Like ten billion dollars' worth of spun gold!"

"Gosh."

"Wait till you see her," said Milton.

"And the demon?" I queried.

"I didn't see any demon, Bill."

There was silence for a little space.

"Then," I said, "the whole thing is true, after all."

"You mean what grandfather Scranton set down in his journal, and the rest of it?"

I nodded.

"I never doubted that, Bill."

"At times," I told him, "I didn't doubt it. Then, again, it all seemed so wild and unearthly that I didn't know what to think."

"I think," he said with a wan smile, "that you know what to think now — now when you are standing in this very way to Drome, whatever Drome may be."

"Yes. And yet the thing is so strange. Think of it A world of which men have never dreamed, save in the wild-

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est romance! An underground world. Subterranean ways, subterranean cities, men and women there—"

"Cavernicolous Aphrodites!" said Milton Rhodes.

"And all down there in eternal darkness!" I exclaimed. "Why, the thing is incredible. No wonder that I sometimes find myself wondering if I am not in a dream."

Said Milton Rhodes:

"'*All* that we see or seem
Is but a dream within a dream.'

"But come, Bill," he added. "Don't let this *a priori* stuff bowl you over. In the first place, it isn't dark down there—when, that is, you get down far enough."

"In Heaven's name, how do you know that?"

"Why, for one thing, if this subterranean world was one of unbroken darkness, the angel (and the demon) would be blind, like those poor fishes in the Mammoth Cave. But she is no more blind than you or I. Ergo, if for no other reason, we shall find light down there."

"Of course, they have artificial light, or—"

"I don't mean that. If there had not been some other illumination, this strange race (of whose very existence Science has never even dreamed) would have ceased to exist long ago—if, indeed, it ever could have begun."

"But no gleam of sunlight can ever find its way down to that world."

"It never can, of course. But there are other sources of light—nebulas and comets in the heavens, for example, and auroras, phosphorus and fireflies here on earth. The phenomena of phosphorescence are by no means so rare as might be imagined. Why, as Nichol showed, though any man

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who uses his eyes can see it himself, there is light inherent *even in clouds.*"

I have the professor's book before me as I write—J. P. Nichol, LL.D., Professor of Astronomy in the University of Glasgow—and here are his own words:

"Whatever their origin, they [the auroras] show the existence of causes in virtue of whose energy the upper strata of our atmosphere become self-luminous, sometimes in a high degree; for, in northern regions, our travelers have *read* by their brilliance. But the Aurora is not the only phenomenon which indicates the existence of a power in the matter of our globe to emit light. One fact, that must have been often noticed, forcibly impresses me with the conviction, that here, through what seems common, truths of much import will yet be reached. In the dead of night, when the sky is clear, and one is admiring the brilliancy of the stars, hanging over a perfectly obscured earth, a cloud, well known to observing astronomers, will at times begin to form, and it then spreads with astonishing rapidity over the whole heavens. The light of the stars being thus utterly shut out, one might suppose that surrounding objects would, if possible, become more indistinct: but no! what was formerly invisible can now be clearly seen; not because of lights from the earth being reflected back from the cloud—for very often there are none—but in virtue of *the light of the cloud itself,* which, however faint, is yet a similitude of the dazzling shell of the Sun."

After mentioning the phosphorescence of the dark hemisphere of Venus and the belief that something similar has been seen on the unillumined surface of our satellite, he continues thus:

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"But the circumstance most remarkably corroborative of the mysterious truth to which these indications point, is the appearance of our midnight luminary during a total eclipse. By theory, she ought to disappear utterly from the heavens. She should vanish, and the sky seem as if no Moon were in being; but, on the contrary, and even when she passes the very centre of the Earth's shadow, she seems a huge *disc of* bronze, in which the chief spots can easily be described by a telescope."

And that, remember, when the moon is in the utter blackness of the earth's shadow. Of course, another explanation has been advanced; but it does not take the professor long to dispose of that.

"It has been put forth in explanation," he says, "that a portion of the rays of the Sun must be reflected by our atmosphere and bent toward the eclipsed disc, from which again they are reflected to the Earth — thus giving the Moon that bronze color; but, the instant the hypothesis is tested by calculation, we discern its utter inefficiency. Nor is there any tenable conclusion save this:—That the matter both of Sun and planets is capable, in certain circumstances whose exact conditions are not known, of evolving the energy we term light."

All this, and more, Rhodes explained to me, succinctly but clearly.

"Oh, we'll find light, Bill," said he.

All the same this subterranean world for which we were bound presented some unpleasant possibilities, in addition, that is, to those concomitant to its being a habitat of demons — and Heaven only knew what besides.

"And then there is the air," I said. "As we descend, it

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will become denser and denser, until at last we will be able to use these ice-picks on it."

Rhodes, who was removing his creepers, laughed.

"We will have to make a vertical descent of three and one half miles below the level of the sea—a vertical descent of near five miles from this spot where we stand, Bill—before we reach a pressure of even two atmospheres."

"The density then increases rapidly, doesn't it?'..'

"Oh, yes. Three and a half miles more, and we are under a pressure of four atmospheres, or about sixty pounds to the square inch. Three and a half miles farther down, or ten and one half miles in all below the level of the sea, and we have a pressure upon us of eight atmospheres. Fourteen miles, and it will be sixteen atmospheres. At thirty-five miles the air will have the density of water, at forty-eight miles it will be as dense as mercury, and at fifty miles we shall have it as dense as gold."

"That will do!" I told him. "You know that we can never get down that far."

"I have no idea how far we can go down, Bill."

"You know that we could never stand such pressures as those."

"I know that. But, as a matter of fact, I don't know what the pressures are at those depths. Nor does any other man know. What I said a moment ago is, of course, according to the law; but there is something wrong with the law, founded upon that of Mariotte — as any physicist will tell you."

"What's wrong with it?"

"At any rate, the law breaks down as one goes upward, and I have no doubt that it will be found to do so as one

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descends below the level of the sea. If the densities of the atmosphere decrease in a geometrical ratio as the distances from sea-level increase in an arithmetical ratio, then, at a distance of only one hundred miles up, we should have virtually a perfect vacuum. The rarity there would be absolutely inconceivable. For the atmospheric density at that height would be only *one billioneth* of what it is at the earth's surface."

"And what is the real density there?"

"No man knows or can know," replied Rhodes, "until he goes up there to see. But meteors, rendered incandescent by the resistance they encounter, show that a state of things exists at that high altitude very different from the one that would be found there if our formulae were correct and our theories were valid. And so, I have no doubt, we shall find it down in Drome.

"Formulae are very well in their place," he went on, "but we should never forget, Bill, that they are often builded on mere assumption and that a theory is only a theory until experiment (or experience) has shown us that it is a fact. And that reminds me: do you know what Percival Lowell says about formulae?"

I said that I didn't.

"'Formulae,' says the great astronomer, 'are the anaesthetics of thought.'

"I commend that very highly," Milton Rhodes added, "to our fiction editors and our writers of short stories."

"But—"

"But me no buts, Bill," said Milton. "And what do your scientists know about the interior of this old earth that we inhabit, anyway? Forsooth, but very little, Billy, me lad.

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Why they don't even know what a volcano is. One can't make a journey into the interior of the earth on a scratch-pad and a lead-pencil, or, if he does, we may be pardoned if we do not give implicit credence to all that he chooses to tell us when he comes back . For instance, one of these armchair Columbuses (he made the journey in a machine called d^2y by dx^2 and came out in China) says that he found the interior in a state of igneous fluidity. And another? Why, he tells us that the whole earth is as rigid as steel, that it is solid to the very core."

"It seems," said I, "to be a case of

> "'Great contest follows, and much learned dust
> Involves the combatants; each claiming truth,
> And truth disclaiming both.'"

"The truth, in this case, is not yet known, of course," replied Milton Rhodes, "though I trust that you and I, Bill, are fated to learn it — some of it, I should say."

He smiled a queer, wan smile.

"Whether we are fated, also, to reveal it to the world, to *our* world — well, as for that, *quién sabe?*" he said.

"Then," I remarked, my fingers busy removing my ice-creepers, "what we read about the state of things in the interior of the earth — the temperature, the pressure, the density — then all that is pure theory?

"Of course. How could it be anything else? All theory, save, that is, the mean density of the earth. And that mean density gives us something to think about, for it is just a little more than twice that of the *surface materials*. With all this enormous pressure that we hear so much about and the resultant increase of density with depth, the weight of the

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earth certainly ought to be more than only five and one half times that of a globe of equal size composed of nothing but water."*

"Kind of queer, all right," was my comment.

"It is queer, all right — as the old lady said when she kissed the cow. However, as old Dante has it, 'Son! our time asks thrifter using.'"

As the last words left his lips, I straightened up, the toothed shoes in my hand; and, as I did so, I started and cried:

"Hear that?"

Rhodes made no answer. For some moments we stood there in breathless expectation; but that low mysterious sound did not come again.

I said:

"What *was* that?"

"I wish that I knew, Bill. It was faint, it was — well, rather strange."

"It was more than that," I told him. "It seemed to me to

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*"It has been calculated that at the depth of 35 miles, air, subjected to the pressure of a column of matter of the mean density of that at the surface of the earth, would acquire the density of water; that at the depth of 173 miles, water itself, which is eminently incompressible, would acquire the density of marble; and at the centre, marble would have a density 119 times greater than at the surface. *But the comparatively small mean density of the mass [of the earth] proves that none of these effects take place.*"—Brande.

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be hollow — like the sound of some great door suddenly closing."

My companion looked at me rather quickly.

"Think so, Bill?" he said. "I thought 'twas like the sound of something *falling*."

There was a pause, one of many moments, during which pause we stood listening and waiting; but the gallery remained as silent as though it had never known the tread of any living thing.

"Well, Bill," said Milton Rhodes suddenly, "we shall never learn what Drome means if we stay in this spot. As for the creepers, I am going to leave mine here."

The place where he put them, a jutting piece of rock, was a conspicuous one; no one passing along the tunnel could possibly fail to notice the objects resting there. Mine I placed beside them, wondering as I did so if I should ever see this spot again.

Milton then wrote a short note, which recorded little more than our names, the date of our great discovery and that we were going farther. This, carefully folded, he placed beside the creepers and put a rock-fragment upon it. I wondered as I watched him whose would be the eyes that would discover it. Some inhabitant of this underground world, of course, and to such a one the record would be so much Greek. 'Twas utterly unlikely that any one from the world which we were leaving would ever see that record.

"And now, Bill," said Milton Rhodes, "down we go!"

And the next moment we were going — had begun our descent into this most mysterious and dreadful place.

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Chapter 16

"ARE WE ENTERING DANTE'S INFERNO ITSELF?"

WHEN SCRANTON CAME WITH HIS weird story of Old He, I was, I confess, not a little puzzled by his and Milton's reference to the extraordinary scientific possibilities that it presented. At first I could not imagine what on earth they meant. But I saw all those possibilities very clearly now, and a thousand more I imagined. I knew a wild joy, exultation, and yet at the same time the wonder and the mystery of it all made me humble and sober of spirit. I admit, too, that a fear — a fear for which I can find no adequate name — had laid its palsied and cold fingers upon me.

In a few moments we reached that spot where the angel had vanished. There we paused in curiosity, looking about; but nothing was to be seen. The gallery — which from this point swung sharp to the right and went down at a rather steep angle — was as silent as some interstellar void.

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"Bill," smiled Milton Rhodes, "he is idle who might be better employed."

And he started on, or, rather, down. A hundred feet, however — we were now under the glacier — and he halted, turned his light full upon the left-hand wall, pointed and said:

"There you are, Bill — the writing on the wall."

I pressed to his side and stood staring. The rock there was as smooth, almost, as a blackboard; and upon it, traced in white chalk, were three inscriptions, with what we took to be names appended to them. That on the right was clearly a very recent one — had been placed there doubtless, at the most but a few days since, by that "cavernicolous Venus" that Milton Rhodes had seen for so fleeting a moment.

It was Milton's opinion that the characters were alphabetical ones, though at first I was at a loss to understand how they could be anything to him but an utter mystery. The letters were formed by straight lines only. The simplest character was exactly like a plain capital T, with, that is, the vertical line somewhat elongated. And it was made to perform the office of another letter by the simple expedient of standing it upon its head. The number of cross-lines increased up to six, three at the top and three at the bottom; and in one or two characters there were two vertical lines, placed close together.

"Evidently," observed Milton Rhodes, "this alphabet was constructed on strictly scientific principles."

For a space we stood there looking, wondering what was recorded in that writing so strange and yet, after all, so very and beautifully simple. Then Milton proceeded to place another record there, and, as he wrote, he hummed:

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"'When I see a person's name
Scratched upon a glass,
I know he owns a diamond
And his father owns an ass.'"

The inscription finished, we resumed our descent. The way soon became steep and very difficult.

"That Aphrodite of yours," I observed as we made our way down a particularly rugged place, "must have the agility of a mountain-goat."

"Your rhetoric, Bill Barrington Carter, is horrible. Wait till you see her; you'll never be guilty of thinking of a goat when she has your thoughts."

"By the way, what kind of a light did the lady have?"

"Light? Don't know. I was so interested in the angel herself that I never once thought of the light that she carried. I don't know that she needs a light, anyway."

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"Why, I fancy, Bill, that her very presence would make even Pluto's gloomy realm bright and beautiful as the Garden of the Hesperides."

"Oh, gosh!" was my comment.

"Wait till you see her, Bill."

"I'll probably see her demon first."

"Hello!" exclaimed Milton.

"What now?"

"Look at that," said he, pointing. "I think we have the explanation of that mysterious sound, which you thought was like that of a great door suddenly closing: in her descent, she dislodged a rock-fragment, and that sound we heard must have been produced by the mass as it went plunging down."

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"'Tis very likely, but —"

"Great Heaven!" he exclaimed.

"What is it now?

"I wonder, Bill, if she lost her footing here and went plunging down, too."

I had not thought of that. And the possibility that that lovely and mysterious being might be lying somewhere down there crushed and bleeding, perhaps dying or lifeless, made me feel very sad. We sent the rays of our powerful lights down into those silent depths of the tunnel, but nothing was visible there, save the dark rock and those fearful shadows — fearful what with the secrets that might be hidden there.

"The answer won't come to us, Bill," said Milton.

"No, "I returned as we started down; "we must go get it."

The gallery at this place had an average width of, I suppose, ten feet, and the height would average perhaps fifteen. The reader must not picture the walls, the roof and the floor as smooth, however. The rock was much broken, in some spots very jagged. The gallery pitched at an angle of nearly forty-five degrees, which will give some idea of the difficulties encountered in the descent.

At length we reached what may be called the bottom; here the tunnel gave another turn and the pitch became a gentle slope. And there we found it, the rock-fragment, weighing perhaps two hundred pounds, that the angel had dislodged in her descent — which doubtless had been a hurried, a wild one.

"Thank Heaven!" I exclaimed, "she didn't come down with it!"

"Amen," said Milton.

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Then a sudden thought struck me, a thought so unworthy that I did not voice it aloud. But to myself I said:

"It is possible that we may find ourselves, before we get out of this, wishing that she had."

If a human being, one of the very best of human beings even, were to voice his uttermost, his inmost thoughts, what a shameful, what a terrible monster they would call him — or her!

And the demon? Where was the angel's demon?

I could give no adequate description of those hours that succeeded. Steadily we continued the descent — now gentle, now steep, rugged and difficult. Sometimes the way became very narrow — indeed, at one point we had to squeeze our way through, so closely did the walls approach each other — then, again, it would open out, and we would find ourselves in a veritable chamber. And, in one of these, a lofty place, the vaulted roof a hundred feet or more above our heads, we made a discovery — a skeleton, quasi-human and *with wings.*

I made an exclamation of amazement.

"In the name of all that's wonderful and terrible," I cried, "are we entering Dante's Inferno itself?"

A faint smile touched the face of Rhodes.

"Don't you," he asked, "know what this is?"

"It must be the bones of a demon."

"Precisely. Grandfather Scranton, you'll remember, wounded that monster, up there by the Tamahnowis Rocks. Undoubtedly the bullet reached a vital spot, and these are that creature's bones."

"But," I objected, "these are *human* bones — a human

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skeleton with wings. According to Scranton, there was nothing at all human about the appearance of that thing which he called a demon."

"I admit," said Rhodes, "that this skeleton, at the first glance, has an appearance remarkably human — if, that is, one can forget the wings. The skull, I believe, more than anything else, contributes to that effect; and yet, at a second glance, even that loses its human semblance. For look at those terrible jaws and those terrible teeth. Who ever saw a human being with jaws and teeth like those? And look at the large scapulae and the small hips and the dwarfish, though strong, nether limbs. Batlike, Bill, strikingly so. And those feet. No toes; they are talons. And see that medial ridge on the sternum, for the attachment of the great pectoral muscles."

"A bat-man, then?" I queried.

"I should say a bat-ape."

"Or an ape-bat."

"Whichever you prefer," smiled Milton.

"Well," I added, "at any rate, we have a fair idea now of what a demon is like."

Little wonder, forsooth, that old Sklokoyum had declared that the thing was a demon from the white man's Inferno itself. And this creature so dreadful — well, the angel had one like it for a companion. When Rhodes saw her, she was, of course, without that terrible attendant: undoubtedly the next time, though — how long would it be? — she would not be alone.

"Oh, well," I consoled myself, "we have our revolvers."

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Chapter 17

LIKE BALEFUL EYES

ACCORDING TO THE ANEROID, THIS great chamber is about four thousand feet above the level of the sea; in other words, we had already made a vertical descent of some four thousand feet. We were now about as high above the sea as the snout of the Nisqually Glacier. But what was our direction from the Tamahnowis Rocks? So sinuous had been this strange subterranean gallery, my orientation had been knocked into a cocked hat. It was Milton's belief, however, that we had been moving in a northerly direction, that we were still under the peak itself, probably under the great Emmons Glacier. I confess that I would not have cared to place a wager on the subject. Goodness only knew where we were, but of one thing there could be no doubt: we were certainly there.

"Why," I asked, "didn't we bring along a compass?"

"I think," returned Milton Rhodes, slipping loose his

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pack and lowering it to the floor, "that, as it was, we had a case of another straw and the camel's back's busted. Let's take a rest — it's twenty minutes after one — and a snack. And another thing: we wouldn't know whether to trust the compass or not."

"Why so?"

"Local attraction, Bill. Many instances of this could be given. One will suffice. Lieutenant Underwood, of the Wilkes Exploring Expedition, found a deviation of thirteen and a quarter points on the summit of the Cobu Rock, in the Feejees — one hundred and forty-nine degrees. The Island of Nairai was directly north, and yet, according to the compass, it bore southeast-by-south one quarter south, whilst, placed at the foot of the rock, that very same compass said Nairai bore north! So you see that that faithful friend of man, and especially of the mariner, has in its friendships some qualities that are remarkably human.

"Still," Rhodes added, "I wish that we had brought one along. Also, we should have brought a manometer, for the aneroid will be worthless after we have descended below sea-level. Oh, well, the boiling-point of water will give us the atmospheric pressure: under a pressure of two atmospheres, water boils at 249.5° Fahrenheit; under a pressure of three atmospheres, at 273.3°; four atmospheres, 291.2°; five, 306°; six, 318.2°; seven, 329.6°; eight, 339.5°; and so on. On the summit of Rainier, it boils at about 185°."

"I wish that we were headed for the summit," said I. "Eight atmospheres! When we reach that pressure — if we ever do — we'll be ten and a half miles below the level of the sea, won't we?"

Rhodes nodded.

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"According to the law. But, as I remarked, there is something wrong with the law. 'Tis my belief that we shall be able to descend much deeper than ten and one half miles — that is, that the atmospheric pressure will permit us to do so."

"That qualification," I told him, "is very apropos, for there is no telling what the inhabitants of this underground world will permit us to do or will do to us — bat-apes or ape-bats, humans, or both."

"That, of course, is very true, Bill."

"And," said I, "we won't need a manometer, or we won't need to ascertain the boiling-point of water, to know that the pressure is increasing. Our eardrums will make us painfully aware of that fact."

"When that comes, swallow, Billy, swallow, and the pain will be no more."

"Swallow?"

"Swallow," Milton nodded.

"Great Barmecide, swallow what?"

"Swallow the pain, Bill. For look you. Deglutition opens the Eustachian tube. Some of the dense air enters the drum and counteracts the pressure on the outside of the membrane. You keep swallowing. The air in the drum becomes as dense as that outside; there is no pressure on the membrane now — or, rather, the pressures are in perfect equilibrium— and, presto and abracadabra, the pain is gone."

"Who would have thunk it?"

"A gink," said Rhodes, "going into compressed air had better think it, or do it without thinking it. He may have his eardrums burst in if he doesn't."

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"But why does the Eustachian tube open only when we swallow?"

"To shut from the ear the sounds produced in the throat and mouth. If the tube were always open, our heads would be so many bedlams."

"Wonderful Nature!" I exclaimed.

"Oh, she does fairly well," admitted Milton Rhodes.

"And I suppose," I said, "that the pain in the ears experienced by those who ascend high mountains is to be explained in the same way, only vice versa. They too ought to swallow."

"Of course. At lofty heights, the dense air in the drum presses the membrane outwards. Swallowing permits the dense air to escape. One swallows until the pressure on the inside equals that of the rarefied outside air, and, hocus-pocus and presto, the pain has evaporated."

"I hope," I said, "that all our difficulties will be as easily resolved."

"Hey!" cried Milton.

"What's the matter now?"

"Stop *swallowing* that water! We've got food sufficient for a week, but we haven't got water to last a week or anything like a week. Keep up that guzzling, and your canteen will be empty before sunset."

"Sunset? Sweet Pluto! Sunrise, sunset or high noon, it's all the same here in Erebus."

"You'll say that it's very different," dryly remarked Milton Rhodes, "if you find the fingers of Thirst at your throat."

"Surely there is water in this place — somewhere."

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"Most certainly there is. But we don't know how far we are from that somewhere. And, until we get to it, our policy, Bill, must be one of watchful conservation."

A silence ensued. I sank into profound and gloomy meditation. Four thousand feet down. A mile deeper, and where would we be? The prospect certainly was, from any point of view, dark and mysterious enough, dark and mysterious enough, forsooth, to satisfy the wildest dream of a Poe or a Doré. To imagine a Dante's Inferno, however, is one thing, and to find yourself in it is quite another. These are things, by the way, that should not be confounded. 'Tis true, we weren't in it yet; but we were on our way.

I hasten to say, though, that I had no thoughts of turning back. No such thought, even the slightest, was entertained for one single moment. I did not blink, that was all. I believed our enterprise was a very dangerous one; I believed it was very probable that we should never return to the light of the sun. Such thoughts are not pleasant, are, indeed, horrible. And yet, in the very horror of them, I found a strange fascination. Yes, we might leave our bones in this underground world, in this very gallery even. Even so, we should have our own exceeding great reward. For ours would be the guerdon of dying in a stranger, a more wonderful quest than any science or discovery ever had known. A strange reward, you say mayhap, and perhaps you wonder what such a reward can mean to a dying or a dead man. All I have to say is that, if you do, you know naught of that flaming spirit which moves the scientist and the discoverer, that such as you should never — indeed, can ever — seek the dread secrets of Nature or journey to her hidden places.

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We rested there for exactly one hour. The temperature, by the way, was 57° Fahrenheit. When we resumed the descent, I was using the phosphorus-lamp instead of the electric one. It was not likely that even our electric lights would fail us; still there was no guessing what might happen, and it might be well, I thought, to adopt a policy of light-conservation also. As for the phosphorus lamps, these would furnish light for *six months*. In this, they were simply wonderful; but there was one serious drawback: the light emitted was a feeble one.

The manufacture of this lamp (at one time used, I believe, in Paris, and probably elsewhere, in magazines containing explosives) is simplicity itself. Into a glass phial is put a small piece of phosphorus. The phial is filled two-thirds full of olive-oil, heated to the boiling point. The thing is hermetically corked, and there you are. When you wish to use your wonderful little pharos, you simply allow air to enter. The space above the oil becomes luminous then. You replace the cork, and the phial remains sealed until there is occasion to restore the waning light, which you do, of course, by allowing more air to enter. As has been said, such a phial will furnish light for a half-year.

These phials of ours were set each in a metal frame and protected by a guard in such fashion that it would take a heavy blow to break the glass. When not in use, they were kept in strong metal cylinders. Of course, the electric light could be turned on at any instant.

There were places where the gallery pitched in a way to make the head swim, many spots in which we had to exercise every caution; a false step might have spelled irrevocable

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disaster. I wondered how the angel had passed down those difficult places, and many pictures of that mysterious creature, as I wondered, came and went. Well, she had passed down and that without mishap. Where was she now? Indeed, where were we ourselves?

Steadily we toiled our downward way. For a long distance, the gallery ran with but slight deviation either to the right or to the left, though the descent was much broken; I mean now was steep and now gentle, now at some angle intermediate. Rhodes thought that we were now moving in an easterly direction; it might have been north, east, south or west for all I knew. Not a trickle of water had we seen, not even a single drop, which I confess caused some unpleasant thoughts to flicker through my mind.

At five o'clock we were two thousand feet above sea-level; at half past seven, about half a thousand. And we then decided to call it a day. Nor was I at all sorry to do so, even though we might be near some strange, even great discovery, for I was very tired, and sore from the top of my head to the end of my toes. I was in fair trim, and so was Milton Rhodes; but it would take us some time to get used to such work as this.

A very gentle current of air, so slight that it required experiment to detect it, was passing down the gallery. The temperature here was 62° Fahrenheit.

We had stopped before a cavity in the wall, and, in that little chamber, we passed the night, one holding watch whilst the other slept.

My dreams were dreadful, but otherwise the night was as peaceful as any that ever passed over Eden. Neither Rhodes

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The light clung to them like wraiths
advanced, in little stream

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fog, to be slowly dissipated, as they
nd eddies behind them.

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nor I, during that strange, eerie vigil there in the heart of the living rock, heard even the faintest, the most fleeting sound. As the watcher sat there waiting and listening, whilst the minutes slowly passed, he found himself — at any rate, I know that I did — almost wishing that some pulsation would come, so heavy and awful was the stillness of the place.

But a sound we were to hear. We had been journeying for about an hour and a half and had just passed below sea-level. In that place Rhodes had left the aneroid. Of a sudden Milton, who was leading the way, halted with a low, sharp interjection for silence. When my look struck him, he was standing in an attitude of the most riveted attention.

"There!" he exclaimed. "Did you hear that, Bill?"

The air had pulsed to the faintest sound; now all was still again.

"What was it?" I asked, my voice a whisper.

"Don't know, Bill. Haven't an idea. There!"

Again that gentle pulsation touched the ear, and again it was gone. And a strange thing was that, for the life of me, I could not have told whether it came from below or from behind us.

"There it is again!" said Rhodes.

I flashed on my electric light, to the full power.

"A whisper!" I exclaimed. "Angel, demon, human or what? And, great Heaven, Milton!"

"What now, Bill?" he asked quickly.

"It's something *behind us!*"

He started. He turned his light up the tunnel, and for some moments we stood peering intently. Not a moving

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thing was to be seen there, however — only the moving shadows.

"Again!" said Milton Rhodes. "But it isn't a whisper, Bill. And it didn't come from up there."

"The thing," I told him, "could be hiding in shadow — hiding and watching us."

"It's not up there; it's ahead."

"Wherever it is, what on earth can it be? Whatever it is, what does this mean?"

"That we shall learn."

We resumed our descent, every sense, you may be sure, on the qui vive. The tunnel here inclined rather steeply; a little space, however, and the dip was a gentle one. The sounds soon became one steady, unbroken whisper; then a dull melancholy murmur.

Abruptly Milton Rhodes stopped. He turned to me, and he laughed.

"Know now what it is, Bill?"

This was not a moment, I thought, for laughter or anything like it.

"Sounds like the growling of beasts," I said, peering intently down the passage. "I wonder if the angel — there are two kinds of angel, you know — has turned loose a whole pack, or herd, or flock, of those demons."

To my surprise and astonishment, Rhodes burst into outright laughter.

"Well?" said I rather testily. "Why all the cachinnation?"

"Forgive me, Bill. But it isn't a pack of demons — or a flock of those charming creatures."

"How on earth do you know *what* it is?"

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"It's water."

"Water?"

"Yes. H_2O."

"Water? I'm from Missouri. You'd better see that your revolver is handy. Who ever heard water make a shivery sound like that?"

"You'll see that I'm right, Bill, though I think that you'll hear first."

Ere long there could be no doubt about it: Milton was right; it was the sound of falling water. I was not in a hurry, however, to admit the fact. I had to let myself down gracefully. At length, though, it was impossible to hold out any longer.

"Must be at quite a distance," I said; "sounds carry a long way in tubes, and that is what this tunnel is."

Steadily we made our way along and down, and, just as steadily, the sound increased in volume. The gallery made several sharp turns, and then of a sudden the sound rose from a loud growl to a roar, and we fetched up and an exclamation burst from us.

It is impossible to convey to the reader the eerie effect of that sudden, strange transition. One moment we were in the gallery; the next we had issued from it and stood in a most tremendous cavern, or, rather, we stood on a ledge or a shelf high up on one of the walls of that cavern.

The opposite side was but dimly visible. The roof swept across a hundred feet or more above our heads. And the bottom? I gazed at the edge of the rock-shelf on which we stood, out and down into that yawning abyss, and I felt a shudder run through me and one through my heart.

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The roar of the falling waters came from our right. We turned the rays of our lights in that direction, but nothing was visible there, save the dark limestone rock and Cimmerian blackness.

We then moved to the edge and turned our lights down into those awful depths — to depths perhaps never before touched by ray of light since time began. Far down the beams went plunging and farther still; but we could not see the bottom. Bottom there was, however, for the water was tumbling and growling down there.

I was glad to draw back from the edge, and I leaned against the rock-wall and gazed upon the dark scene in wonder, amazement and in awe.

In a few moments Rhodes joined me.

"Well, what do you think of it, Bill?"

"Milton, this is awful."

"It is. I have never seen a sight more strange and terrible."

"And the angel?" I queried.

"What about her, Bill?"

"How on earth did she make her way through this awful place?"

"Why, along this ledge on which we are standing. There is no other way."

I glanced along that shelf, and I did not like what I saw.

"She's got a better head," I told him, "than I have got. Why didn't we bring along an airplane? I wonder if the way lies down or up, up towards the fall."

We bent over and examined the rock.

"Down," I observed.

"Down," Milton nodded.

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Whilst I stood there pondering this and wondering what was down there in the blackness of that frightful chasm, Rhodes moved off to the right and examined the ledge there.

"And *up* too," he announced. "Somebody or some thing, or both, has gone up towards the fall."

"Great Heaven, if we get caught between them!"

"The programme *is* becoming interesting," Milton Rhodes admitted.

For a time we stood in silence, then he said:

"I suggest, Bill, that we go up and take a look-see."

I nodded. So far as I could perceive, one way was just as good — I mean just as bad — as the other.

That shelf was, as a whole, not an easy thing to negotiate, and some spots made my head swim and made me wish mightily that I was somewhere else. Undoubtedly, some thousands of years in the dim and mysterious past, the stream once flowed at this level; at any rate, this is the only theory that, in my opinion, will explain that ledge, and something which we were soon to discover. Not that I ever spent much time in worrying about theories and hypotheses; the facts themselves gave me enough to think about, enough and to spare.

At times the shelf would be twenty or thirty feet in width or even more, and then the going was easy enough; but at other times the space would contract to something like a yard, and then it was quite another story. Indeed, once or twice Milton Rhodes himself, an experienced and fearless mountain-climber, was glad, I believe, that the way was no narrower. As for what those moments meant to me — well, I never posed as a mountaineer or a steeplejack.

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For fifteen minutes or so, I believe, we toiled along that terrible place, and then of a sudden came the end. Nothing before us but the bare precipitous rocky wall and the black profundity of the chasm, and up above a ghostly thing crawling, crawling down, ever down, and filling the place with thunder — the fall itself. Where did the water come from? From one of the glaciers? And, a question more interesting, where did it go?

"We must go back," said Milton Rhodes. "The road to Drome does not lie here."

Scarcely had we turned when I started, and then I cried out sharply.

"Look!" I said, pointing with my alpenstock down the cavern. "Look at that!"

Far down the cave a light was gleaming, where a moment before no light had been. And on the instant another shone beside it. A second or two, however, and they had vanished.

"Moving," was Rhodes' explanation. "The bearers of those lights moved behind something."

"No!" I told him. "They didn't move. They just went out. And look! *Again!*"

There the lights were again — gleaming at us for all the world like the dim and baleful eyes of some waiting monster.

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Chapter 18

"THAT'S WHERE THEY ARE WAITING FOR US!"

FOR SOME MOMENTS THOSE YELLOW eyes gleamed at us, then vanished. The lids of that waiting monster (so to speak) had closed over them.

I had watched them very intently, and I was sure that there had been no movement of the eyes themselves. Milton, however, was just as sure that they had moved.

"To the right or to the left?" I queried.

"Neither. Down," said Rhodes.

"Then it must have been straight down."

"It was. Down behind a rock-mass or something."

We waited, watching closely, but those yellow eyes did not gleam again through that Stygian gloom.

"Must have been at quite a distance," I remarked at last.

"It seems so, Bill; and that means that this cavern is very straight for a mile or more or that it is one of enormous size."

"It may be both."

"It may be, of course," he nodded. "And it may be that those lights were not so far away as they appeared to us

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to be. One may easily be deceived in such matters."

"We don't know what this means," I said; "but we know this: we're spotted."

"Oh, we're seen, all right, Bill. Our every movement will be watched."

Some minutes passed, during which we stood peering down the cavern and waiting; but no light gleamed forth again.

Then we started back.

"We'd better keep a sharp lookout," I said suddenly. "Remember, a demon doesn't have to come along the ledge to get at us."

"I have not forgotten that, Bill; but we are armed."

As I believe was made sufficiently obvious, the crossing of those places where the ledge narrowed to the width of but a yard or so had been no pleasant matter; but, during this the return, the thing assumed (in my imagination, at any rate) an aspect truly sinister. That we were being watched both of us regarded as certain. That we might at any moment find a demon or a dozen demons driving at us—well, that was a possibility which never left our thoughts for one single second. And, in those narrow places, where the ledge contracted to a mere ribbon of rock, it was all that one wanted to do to hug the wall and make sure of his footing. A frightful place truly in which to meet, even with a revolver, the attack of but one of those winged monsters; and we might find ourselves attacked by a dozen.

It can easily be imagined, then, the relief which I felt when we had passed the last narrow spot, though, forsooth, we might be going towards something far more dangerous than anything that we had left behind us. But the angel

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had gone down, and where a woman could go, there, I told myself in masculine pride, could we also.

"That is," I subjoined, "supposing that we do not meet ape-bats or something more terrible."

At length we stood once more at the mouth of the gallery. And scarcely had we stopped there when an unpleasant thing flashed into my thoughts — which, as it was, resembled anything but the rainbow.

"Great Heavens!" I cried, peering into the tunnel, which, at the distance of only thirty feet or so, gave a sudden turn to the right.

Something could be in there, very close to us and yet unseen.

"What is it, Bill?"

"Could those lights that we saw have been *here?* Are they waiting in there to dog our steps or to do something worse?"

Rhodes, peering into the gallery with a curious, half-vacuous expression on his face, made no reply.

"Well," I queried, "what do you think of it? We could not tell where those lights were, how far away — anything."

"I don't think that they were here," Milton Rhodes returned. "I think that they were much farther down and *on the other side.*"

"On the other side? How on earth could any one cross that chasm?"

"We don't know what it is like down there. And, of course, I don't *know* that the lights were on the other side. But I believe that they were."

A silence ensued, which at length I broke:

"What is the next thing on the programme?"

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"Make our way down the ledge. That is the only way there is for us to go. But first we'll try a little finesse."

He took a position in the mouth of the tunnel, one that permitted him to look down the great cavern. He signed to me to follow suit, and, when I stood at his side, he said:

"Off go the lights."

Off they went, and the blackness was upon us. So terrible was it and so strange and fearful that place in which we stood, I actually found myself wondering if it would not all prove to be a dream.

"Why," I asked at last, "did we do this?"

"To see if those lights that we saw will show again. Those Dromans may think that we have lost heart and started back."

I saw it all now: instead of our advancing to those mysterious being somewhere down the cavern, he would bring them to us.

But they did not come. They did not show even the faintest gleam. We waited there for many minutes, but nothing whatever was seen.

"Hum," said Rhodes at last, snapping on his light. "It didn't work. Wary folk, Bill, these Hypogeans."

"And so," I replied, "we'll have to go to them.'

"That's what we shall have to do."

"And," I added, "by doing so, walk maybe right into a trap.'

"It is possible, certainly," Rhodes admitted. "But, as the brave Pliny said, *Fortes Fortuna iuvat.*"

"I don't remember much of my Latin," I told him; "but I remember what happened to Pliny. And I remember enough to know that *Fortuna caeca est.*"

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"So's Love," returned Rhodes. "And he's pretty clever, too, the little chap is, when it comes to setting traps. But men and women, for all that, still keep going to meet him.

"But in this business now before us," he went on, "it is possible that the trap may not prove so terrible, possible, indeed, that there is no trap at all. Be that as it may, I tell you, old *tillicum,* I certainly would like to see that angel again."

"Then let's go see her."

"That's just what we'll do."

And so we started.

A strange, indefinable dread had its grip upon me, and yet I was anxious to go, to put the thing to an issue. In all probability, we should not have far to travel. Nor, in fact, did we.

The way was much like the one that we had traversed in the opposite direction. One or two spots were even more dangerous than any we had found up there. And, over those narrow, dangerous places, where a false step or a slip of the foot on the smooth rock would have meant a most horrible death — along this airy, dizzy Stygian way, the angel had passed. Well, she was a brave angel, at any rate.

We were descending all the while, sometimes at an angle that I was glad was no steeper. This does not mean, however, that our distance from the bottom of that black chasm, on our right, was decreasing. The sounds that came up from the unknown depths of it told plainly that the descent of the stream was as pronounced as that of the ledge we were following, and perhaps more so.

"And here's something that I don't understand," was my

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remark as we stopped in a particularly broken spot: "to say nothing of our being below sea-level, here this stream has been pouring down for untold centuries, for how many thousands of years no man can even guess, and yet the place isn't full. Where does all the water go?"

"Think," was Milton's answer, "of all the rivers that, for how many *millions* of years no man can tell, have been running into the sea, and yet the sea is not overflowing."

"I don't see the application of that to this underground world, don't see how all the water — there must be more streams than this one — can possibly return as vapor to the region above."

"I admit," Rhodes said, "that the problem is a formidable one and that, with our present paucity of data, we can not hope to solve it. Still I think that my suggestion is sound."

"But where are the openings to permit the escape of so enormous, for enormous it must be, amount of water-vapor?"

"There may be countless vents, fissures, Bill, ways of egress that man will never know. Whatever the explanation, there can be do doubt that the water is going down and that this subterranean world into which we have found our way is not full."

"But where does it go? Down to some sunless sea perhaps, though, if that hypothesis of yours is a sound one, bathed in light, a light never seen, in that world we have left, on land or sea."

Rhodes was silent for a moment, leaning on his alpenstock. Then:

"It is strange truly, the descent of the waters. And yet it would not, I believe, have been to you so very strange a

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thing had you known that the sea itself flows into the earth."

"The sea itself?"

Rhodes nodded.

"Surely, Milton — why, the thing sounds like something from Jules Verne or from Lucian's *Icaromenippus*."

"On the contrary," he told me, "it is not a bit out of romance either modern or ancient, but it is a fact that has long been known. At Argostoli in the Island of Cephalonia, the sea flows right into the limestone rock."*

"Shades of Lemuel Gulliver, but this old ball that men call the earth is certainly, after all, a strange old sphere!"

"How strange," said Milton Rhodes, "no scientist has ever dreamed, though your scientist has thought of things far stranger than any that were ever conceived by your wildest romancer, who, after all, Bill, is a pretty tame homo."

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*"The cases are certainly not numerous where marine currents are known to pour continuously into cavities beneath the surface of the earth, but there is at least one well-authenicated instance of this sort — that of the mill streams at Argostoli in the island of Cephalonia. It has been long observed that the sea water flowed into several rifts and cavities in the limestone rocks of the coast, but the phenomenon has excited little attention until very recently. In 1833, three of the entrances were closed, and a regular channel, sixteen feet long and three feet wide, with a fall of three feet, was cut into the mouth of a larger cavity. The sea water flowed into this canal, and could be followed eighteen or twenty feet beyond its inner terminus, when it disappeared in holes and clefts in the rock."—George P. Marsh: *Man and Nature*.

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"I have an idea," I answered, glancing down the cavern, "that we are going to find the homos here in this place anything but tame."

Milton laughed, and then suddenly, without any other answer, he turned and resumed the descent.

For one thing I was profoundly thankful: the wall ran along without any pronounced cavities or projections in it, so that we had little to apprehend from a sudden attack on this our giddy way—except, of course, an attack by a demon. Had the wall been a broken one, any instant might have found us face to face with a band of Hypogeans, as Rhodes called the denizens of this subterranean place.

But how long would the wall remain like that? And, after all, did it really greatly matter? Meeting, sooner or later — and, in all likelihood, very sooner — was inevitable. 'Tis true, I could not conceive of a worse place than this, supposing the meeting to be, in any measure, an unfriendly one. And, from what had happened up there at the Tamahnowis Rocks, I could not suppose that it would be anything else.

This, however, was to prove simply another instance of how inadequate the imagination, when confronted with the reality, is sometimes found to be, for even now we were drawing near a place more terrible even than this — and that the place where we met!

It required but little imagination, though, to make us aware, and painfully so, of the extreme probability (regarded by ourselves as a certitude) that eyes were watching our every movement. But where were those eyes? And what were the watchers? To what fearful thing — or could it be wonderful — were we drawing near at every single moment now?

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Some minutes passed, perhaps fifteen, perhaps less, perhaps more; I can not say how long it was. Of a sudden, however, Rhodes, who was still leading the way, stopped. Of course, I stopped, too. No sound had escaped him, and he stood there like a statue, peering intently straight ahead.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Look there, Bill," he said in a low voice, pointing with his alpenstock, "and tell me what you see."

I was already looking, and already I had seen it.

But what in the world was that thing which I saw?

I remained silent, gazing with straining eyes and wondering if I really saw what I thought that I did.

"What," Rhodes asked, "do you make of it?"

"The thing is so faint. 'Tis impossible, and yet, if it were not impossible it can be that, I would say that it is an arch — part of a bridge."

"Just what I thought myself, Bill. The thing is so strange, though, so very strange, that I didn't know whether to believe my eyes or not."

"And so dim," I observed, "that it may be nothing of the kind. A bridge? Now, who, in the name of wonder, would build a bridge across this frightful chasm? And why? And how?"

"*Quién sabe,* Bill?" said Milton Rhodes.

The next moment we were moving towards it.

"Look!" ejaculated Rhodes suddenly. "Look at that! It goes clear across!"

"Yes," I said, stopping and gazing at that strange dim mass; "it goes clear across.

"And," I added, "that's the place, over there on the other side — that's where they are waiting for us!"

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Chapter 19

THE ANGEL AND HER DEMON

"I SHOULDN'T BE A BIT SURPRISED," said Milton Rhodes. "And a strange bridge, that, truly. It looks like a ruin, a ruin that has not fallen."

It looked like a ruin indeed. So ruinous did it appear that I wondered how the mass could possibly remain intact. A short advance, however, and the mystery was solved. The hand of man had not builded that great arch across this dreadful chasm; Nature had fashioned it, there in that region of everlasting darkness. It has, Rhodes said, a remarkable semblance to the celebrated Natural Bridge in Virginia.

A short space, and we stood upon it, gazing across. Its width here was about sixty feet. The surface was, comparatively speaking, a smooth one, and it had a rather pronounced slope upwards — a circumstance by no means conducive to security of footing. And a feature that I noticed with some

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unpleasant misgivings was the diminution of width at the farther end. Just how wide it was there we could not tell, what with the uncertain light that struggled to the spot; but we saw enough to know that that way which we should have to cross was a very narrow one indeed; and on either side was the black chasm yawning to receive us. And just beyond, dim and ghostly as though seen in a dream, stupendous columns rose up and were involved in the darkness of the lofty cavern.

"What on earth are those?" I queried. "It reminds one of a Grecian temple."

"Limestone pillars, no doubt," returned Milton.

"And it's there," I exclaimed, my voice, however, low and guarded, "that they are waiting for us! That, I have no doubt now, is where those lights were."

"I think it very likely, Bill."

"They'll wait," said I, "until we get in that cursed narrow place, and then —"

"And then?"

"And then," I told him, "we had better say our prayers before we start across."

Rhodes laughed. I thought, though, that there was a touch of the sardonic in the laugh. Little wonder, forsooth, if 'twas so, for the thing was fraught with some terrible possibilities.

"What," I asked, "are we going to do now?"

"Cross over — that is, if we are permitted to do so."

If we should be permitted to do so!

I gazed into the black profundity of the chasm, and I tell you that I certainly did not feel happy.

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"Why," I asked, "didn't we bring a parachute along? I have an idea that we'll wish before very many minutes that we had done so."

"It is possible," said Rhodes, and his voice and mien were grave, "that we shall. However, Bill, it is cross over — or give the whole thing up and go back."

"Go back? Never!"

"My sentiments to a T, Bill.

"It is possible, though," he added, turning and sending his look along the wall, "that we may find a way out of this infernal place by following the ledge."

"But," was my comment, "not probable."

" 'Twill do no harm," he said, "to see."

"But look here: maybe, if we go on a scouting expedition along the ledge, they'll come over here, come across the bridge, and follow us."

"I don't know," Milton answered, "that such a proceeding on their part would make the matter any more serious than we find it right now. The bridge contracts over there to something like a ribbon of rock."

"Holy Gorgons," I said, "haven't we got into a fine pickle, though?"

"I'll tell you what we'll do, Bill: you remain here, like Horatius at the bridge, while I explore down along the ledge."

"I don't like it," I told him. "United we stand — well, you know the rest of it."

He was silent for some moments. Then:

"I think that we can risk it, Bill."

"Very well," I acquiesced, shrugging my shoulders. "But I tell you that I don't like it at all."

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The next moment, however, he had turned and was moving away down the ledge. I stepped back to the wall (upon which two inscriptions were traced) and waited the result with such composure as I could summon.

At last Rhodes moved behind a projection in the wall. A few moments, and the glow of his light had vanished. He was gone, and I was alone in that terrible place.

The blackness seemed to increase, the shadows to thicken about me and grow denser. But one sound broke the awful silence, which sound seemed to have a quality tangible, crushing — the growl of the water in the abysmal depths of the chasm. And even that sound, as I stood there listening, watching, waiting, seemed to change; it seemed to sink to a murmur, then a whisper, as though evil spirits were hushing it to lull my suspicions and even the very senses of me.

What was that? I started, and something shot through my very heart, chilling and sharp as the needle point of an icicle.

Surely I had seen it. Yes! There it was again, dim but unmistakable, there by one of the great columns — a single point of light, an eye staring at me with a greenish fire.

Yes, there it was. Then of a sudden it was gone.

For a time I stood peering and waiting, the blood throbbing in my ears; but it was not seen again.

I turned and looked down the ledge, and I gave an exclamation that was one of relief and joy, for there was Rhodes just come into view around that projection in the wall.

"What," I asked as he drew near, "did you find down there?"

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"We can't go down. The shelf is broken — nothing but sheer wall between. So it's across the bridge for us."

"We may never reach the other side."

And then I told him what I had seen.

"And," I asked, "didn't grandfather Scranton say that the eyes of the demon burned with a greenish fire?"

Rhodes nodded.

"Then what I saw was a demon's eye. But why didn't I see two. Is this a Polyphemus demon?"

"Can't say, Bill. The greenish fire, however, is nothing but reflected light; in other words, light has to reach them, or the eyes can't shine. In absolute darkness they would not do so."

"It may be different down here in this world. At any rate, that eye shone, though ghostly. And so the angel at least — and Heaven only knows what besides — is waiting there with her demon!"

"I believe so, Bill. There can scarcely be any doubt that the eye which you saw belonged to a demon. The prospect, I admit, is certainly a sinister one."

A silence ensued. Of a sudden Rhodes raised his voice and hallooed:

"Hello there!"

The answer came almost on the instant:

"Hello there — hello there — hello there — hello there — hello — hello!"

"Nobody there but Echo, lovely Echo," smiled Milton Rhodes.

Again he raised his voice, and again the words were thrown back at him.

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"Hear that, Bill?" he cried whilst the echoes were still sounding.

"I heard it."

"*That* was no echo."

"No," I said; "that was not an echo."

We waited, listening intently, but that sound which had come with the echoes was not heard again.

Rhodes drew his revolver and examined the weapon most carefully. He looked at me curiously, and then he said:

"I have no desire, Bill, to disguise the fact that this crossing may prove a most, a most — Bill, it may prove to be the —"

"You needn't tell me," said I. "I know very well what it may mean."

"But we can't turn back, Bill."

"No; we can't turn back."

He reached out his hand and grasped mine. And then, without another word, we started.

I had known some critical, terrible, horrible scenes in my life; but never anything like the suspense and mystery of those moments that now succeeded. What were we to see? What were we to meet? And, horror of horrors, it would be in that place where the bridge narrowed to something like a mere ribbon — the frightful depths yawning on each side, almost at our very feet.

Well, at last we reached it. My head began to swim, so terrible was the place, and I had to stop and get a grip on my nerves. Rhodes too paused, and for some moments we stood there, so near to safety and yet — the mockery of it — closer than ever to mystery and danger and perhaps horror unnamable.

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"Now for it, Bill!" said Rhodes. "Keep your revolver ready for instant action!"

And we started the ascent across.

The place immediately before us was so narrow that we could not think of walking side by side. Rhodes was leading. And then it came — when we had taken eight or ten steps, when we had reached the most dangerous spot on that ribbon of rock.

Of a sudden a dark figure, straining at leash, moved out from behind one of the limestone pillars, and two eyes shone as with a greenish fire, and the strong rays of our lights were flashed back in the gleam of teeth. And, behind that demoniac shape, a tall figure appeared, a figure clothed in white, the eyes wide and blazing, the face white as snow and framed in gleaming gold, which fell down in masses behind the shoulders — a figure majestic, one indescribably lovely and dreadful.

It was the angel and her demon!

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Chapter 20

THE ATTACK

THAT SCENE, LIKE SOME TERRIBLE vision from the pages of Doré, often rises before me — the tall white figure of the angel, the dark, squatting winged monster before her, and we two men from the sunlit world standing there upon that narrow way, the black profundity of the chasm yawning on either side of us.

The angel had indeed well chosen the moment. If that hideous ape-bat, straining at its leash, were loosed at us, our position, despite our revolvers, would be a truly terrible one. Scarce twenty-five feet lay between that Cerberus and ourselves. In case of attack, we would have to drop the monster in its spring — and only a lucky shot could do that — or the result would be a most disastrous one. For we could not meet an attack there; to step aside or to meet the demon in a struggle would mean a plunge over the edge.

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It was indeed a critical, appalling scene, one in which, if I were a believer in the *lex talionis,* I would have no desire to see even my worst enemy placed. Our fate, I thought, was in the hands of that white-clad, white-faced being whom we knew as the angel. The demon, however, as will be seen in a moment, was to take the matter into its own hands, if I may use that expression in speaking of that monster, for hands the thing had none. I can easily see how the demon, in the obscurity of the fog, had seemed to old Scranton a thing that had no shape. But here, the strong rays of our lights turned full upon our demon, the sight was an altogether different one. And a stranger sight surely no man had ever seen up there in that world which we had left, that world so near to us still and yet it seemed so very far away now. It was as though some Circe had changed us into the figures in some dread story of ancient days. And this was what men call the Twentieth Century, the golden age of science and discovery. Well, science doesn't yet know everything — a fact that, I am sorry to say, some scientists themselves are very prone to forget.

"Heavens," said Rhodes, keeping his look fixed on those figures before us, "isn't she a wonderful creature?"

"And it," said I, "an awful thing? And I'd wait a while before saying that she is wonderful. She may prove to be something very different."

The next instant I gave a cry. The demon had made a sudden strain forward. Came a sharp word from the angel, and that Cerberus sank back again. But, though it sank back, that greenish fire in its eyes seemed to burn more fiercely, malevolently than before.

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"I think," I suggested, "that it would be a good plan to move back a little, back to a safer, a wider spot."

"Move back? Never!" said Milton Rhodes. "We are here to move forward, not to go back. And, besides, the way widens out a little up there."

I thought this utterly Quixotic; but, of course, if he didn't want to go back, I couldn't make him. And, if he wouldn't step back, neither would I.

"Look," I said. "She is going to speak."

The angel raised her left hand and motioned to us rather vehemently, at the same time uttering some word, or words.

"No mistaking that, Bill," said Milton.

"No; it is as plain as any words could be:

"'Go back!'"

"I am at a loss," said Rhodes, "how to answer."

Again the angel raised her hand; but she did not motion this time, for the demon, with a blood-curdling sound, deep in its throat, strained forward again, and so suddenly and strongly that the angel was drawn forward a step or two. A sharp word, however, from the angel, and the monster settled back, as a dog does after straining at its leash.

Once more the angel fixed her eyes upon us, or, rather, upon Milton Rhodes. Once more she raised her hand to sign to us to go back. But the sign was never given.

At that instant, as the angel stood there with upraised hand, it happened.

That sound came again, only more horrible than before, and the demon sprang at us. Caught thus off her guard, the angel was jerked, whirled forward. There was a wild, piercing cry, which rose to a scream; but the winged monster paid

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not the slightest heed. It was as though the thing had gone mad.

The woman went down; in an instant, however, she was up again. She screamed at the demon, but it lunged toward us, flapping its great hideous wings and dragging her after it farther out onto the bridge.

Her position now was one of peril scarcely less than our own.

All this had passed, of course. with the quickness of thought. We could not fire, for fear of hitting the angel, right behind the demon; we could not move back; and we could not stand there and let this nightmare-monster come upon us. In a second or two, if nothing were done, it would do so. But what could we do? The thought of saving ourselves by killing the woman — and the chances were a hundred to one that we would kill her if we fired at the demon — was a horrible one. But to stand there and be sent over the edge was horrible, too. And the angel, in all probability, would be killed anyway; that she had not already been jerked from the rock was nothing less than a miracle.

Why didn't she loose her hold on the leash?

These are some of the things that flashed through my mind — yes, even then. I never before knew what a rapid thing thought can be. Oh, those things that shot through my brain in those brief, critical seconds. My whole life, from childhood to that very moment, flashed before me like the film of a cinematograph, though with the speed of light. I wondered what death was like — what it would be like somewhere in the depths of that black gulf. And I wondered why the angel did not loose her hold on that leash. I didn't

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know that she had wrapped the chain around her hand and that the chain had in some way got caught. The poor angel could not free herself.

Little wonder, forsooth, that she was screaming so wildly at the demon.

"We must risk it!" I cried.

"Hold!"

The next instant Milton Rhodes had stepped aside — yes, had stepped right to the very edge of the rock. The demon whirled at him, and, as it whirled, one of its great wings struck me full across the face. I gave myself up for lost, but somehow I kept my place on that ribbon of rock. Another instant, and the monster would be at Milton's throat. But no! From this dizzy position which he had so suddenly taken, the angel was no longer behind the demon, and on the instant Rhodes fired.

Oh, that scream which the monster gave. It struck the rock, and that Rhodes managed to keep his footing on the edge of that fearful place is one of the most amazing things that I have ever seen. But keep it he did, and he fired again and yet again. The demon flapped backward, jerked the angel to her knees and near the edge and then suddenly flat on her face. The next instant the monster disappeared. Its wings began to beat against the rock with a spasmodic sound.

I gave a cry of relief and joy.

But the next moment one of dismay and horror broke from me.

The monster was dragging the angel over the edge!

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Chapter 21

INTO THE CHASM

MILTON RHODES THREW HIMSELF prone on the rock and his right arm around the angel's waist.

"Quick, Bill, quick! Her arm — the whole weight of the monster!"

Her screams had ceased, but from her throat broke a moan, long, tremulous, heartrending — a sound to shake and rend my already quivering nerves, to most dreadfully enhance the indescribable horror of the scene and the moment.

I could do nothing where I was, had to step over the prostrate forms, which, in my heated imagination, were being dragged over the edge.

The wings of the demon were still beating against the rock, the blows not so strong but more spasmodic — the sound a leathery, sickening tattoo.

It will probably be remembered that the angel had held the demon with her right hand. I was now on the angel's right; and, stretched out on the rock, I reached down over the edge in an effort to free her from that dragging monster, the black depths over which we hung turning me dizzy and faint.

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I now saw how the angel had been caught and that she had been dragged so far over the edge that I could not, long-armed though I am, reach the leash. So I grasped her arm and, with a word of encouragement, began to pull. Slowly we drew the monster up. Another moment, and the chain would be within the reach of my other hand. Yes, there. Steady, so. I had reached down my other hand, my fingers were in the very act of closing on the chain, when, horrors, I felt myself slipping along the smooth rock — slipping over into that appalling gulf.

To save myself, I had to let go the angel's arm, and, as the chain jerked to the monster's weight, an awful cry broke from the angel and from Milton Rhodes, and I saw her body dragged farther over.

"Cut it, Bill, cut it!"

"It's a chain."

Rhodes groaned.

"We must try again. Quick. Great Heaven, we can't let her be dragged over into the chasm."

"This horrible spot makes the head swim."

"Steady, Bill, steady," said Rhodes. "Here, hold her while I get a grip with my other arm. Then I'll get a hold on you with my right."

"We'll all be dragged over."

"Nonsense," said Rhodes. "And, besides, I've got a hold with my feet now, in a crack or something."

A few moments, and I was again reaching down, Rhodes' grip upon me this time. Again I laid hold on the angel's arm, and again she and I drew the monster up. This time, though, I got my other hand too on the chain. And yet, even then, the chain hanging slack above my hand, the angel was some

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time in freeing her own, from the fingers of which blood was dropping. But at last she had loosened the chain, and then I let go my hold upon it, and down the demon went, still flapping its wings, though feebly now, and disappeared into those black and fearful depths.

I have no recollection of any sound coming up. In all probability a sound came. Little wonder, forsooth, that I did not hear it.

A moment, and I was back from the edge, and Milton and I were drawing the angel to the safety of that narrow way. She sank back in Rhodes' arms, her eyes closed, her head, almost hidden in the gleaming golden hair, on his shoulder.

"She's fainted," said I.

"Little wonder if she has, Bill."

But she had not. Scarcely had he spoken when she opened her eyes. At once she sat up, and I saw a faint color suffuse those snowy features.

"Well," said I to myself, "whatever else she may be, our angel is human."

We remained there for a little while, recovering from the effects of the horrible scene through which we had passed, then arose and started for that place of safety there amongst the wonderful, stupendous limestone pillars. I was now moving in advance, and I confess (and nothing could more plainly show how badly my nerves had been shaken) that I would gladly have covered those few remaining yards on all fours — if my pride would have permitted me to do so.

Yes, there we stood, by that very pillar behind which the angel had waited for us with her demon. There was her lamp, lantern rather, and dark, save for a mere slit.

I looked at it and looked all around.

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"We saw *two lights*," I said. "And yet she was waiting for us here *alone*."

"There certainly were two lights, Bill; in other words, there certainly were two persons at least. Her companion went somewhere; that is the only explanation that I can think of."

"I wonder where," said I, "and what for."

"Help, in all likelihood. You know, Bill, I have an idea that, if we had delayed much longer, our reception there," and he waved a hand toward the bridge, "would have been a very different one."

"It was interesting enough to suit me. And, as it is, Heaven only knows what is to follow. This is, perhaps, just the beginning of things."

The angel, standing there straight and still, was watching us intently, so strange a look in her eyes — those eyes were blue — that a chill passed through my heated brain, and I actually began to wonder if I was being hypnotized. Hypnotized? And in this cursed spot.

I turned my look straight into the eyes of the angel, and, as I looked, I flung a secret curse at that strange weakness of mine and called myself a fool for having entertained, even for a fleeting moment, a thought so absurd.

Rhodes had noticed, and he turned his look upon me and upon the woman — this creature so indescribably lovely and yet with so indefinable, mysterious a Sibylline something about her. For some moments there was silence. I thought that I saw fear in those blue eyes of hers, but I could not be sure. That strange look, whether one of fear or of something else, was not all that I saw there; but I strove in vain to find a name or a meaning for what I saw.

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Science, science! This was the age of science, the age of the jet-plane, the atom-bomb, radium, television and radio; and yet here was a scene to make Science herself rub her eyes in amazement, a scene that might have been taken right out of some wild story or out of some myth of the ancient world. Well, that ancient world too had its science, some of which science, I fear (though this thought would have brought a pooh-pooh from Milton Rhodes) man has lost to his sorrow. And, like that ancient world, so perhaps had this strange underground world which we had entered — or, rather, were trying to enter. And perhaps of that science or some phases of it, this angel before us had fearful command.

One moment I told myself that we should need all the courage we possessed, all the ingenuity and resource of that science of which Milton Rhodes himself was the master; the next, that I was letting my imagination overleap itself and run riot.

My thoughts were suddenly broken by the voice of Milton:

"Goodness, Bill, look at her hand. I forgot."

He stepped toward the angel and gently lifted her blood-dripping hand. The chain had sunk right into the soft flesh. The angel, with a smile and a movement with her left hand, gave us to understand that the hurt was nothing.

The next moment she gave an exclamation and gazed past me and down the pillared cavern.

Instantly I turned, and, as I did so, I too exclaimed.

There, far off amongst the sinter-columns, two yellow, wrathful lights were gleaming. And soon we saw them — dark hurrying figures moving towards us.

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Chapter 22

WHAT DID IT MEAN?

"THE HELP IS COMING, BILL," SAID Milton Rhodes. "And that reminds me: I haven't reloaded my revolver."

"I would lose no time in doing so," I told him.

He got out the weapon and proceeded to reload it. It was not, by the way, one of these new-fangled things but one of your old-fashioned revolvers — solid, substantial, one that would stand hard usage, a piece to be depended upon. And that it seemed was just what we needed — weapons to be depended upon.

The angel was watching Rhodes closely. I wondered if she knew what had killed her demon; knew, I mean, that this metal thing, with its glitter so dull and so cold, was a weapon. It was extremely unlikely that she had, in that horrible moment on the bridge, seen what actually had hap-

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pened. However that might have been, it was soon plain that she recognized the revolver as a weapon, or, at any rate, guessed that it was.

With an interjection, she stepped to Rhodes' side, and, with swift pantomime, she assured us that there was nothing at all to apprehend from those advancing figures.

"After all," Milton said, slipping the revolver into his pocket, "why should we be so infernally suspicious? Maybe this world is very different from our own."

"That's just what I'm afraid of. And it seems to me," I added, my right hand in that pocket which contained my revolver, "that we have good cause to be suspicious. Have you forgotten what grandfather Scranton saw up there at the Tamahnowis Rocks (and what he didn't see) and the death there, so short a time since, of Rhoda Dillingham, to say nothing of what happened to us here a few minutes ago? That we are not at the bottom of that chasm — well, I am not anxious to have another shave like that."

"I have not, of course, forgotten any of that, Bill. I have an idea, though, that those tragedies up there were purely accidental. Certainly we know that the demon's attack upon ourselves was entirely so."

"Accidental? Great Scott, some consolation that."

I looked at Milton Rhodes, and I looked at the angel, who had taken a few steps forward and was awaiting those hurrying figures — a white-clad figure, still and tall, one lovely, majestic. And, if I didn't sigh, I certainly felt like doing so.

"No demon there, Bill," observed Milton at last, his eyes upon those advancing forms.

"I see none. Four figures. I see no more than four."

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"Four," nodded Rhodes. "Two men and two women."

A few moments, and they stepped out into a sort of aisle amongst the great limestone pillars. The figure in advance came to an abrupt halt. An exclamation broke from him and echoed and re-echoed eerily through the vast and gloomy cavern. It was answered by the angel, and, as her voice came murmuring back to us, it was as though fairies were hidden amongst the columns and were answering her.

But there was nothing fairylike in the aspect of that leader (who was advancing again) or his male companion. That aspect was grim, formidable. Each carried a powerful bow and had an arrow fitted to the string, and at the left side a short heavy sword. That aspect of theirs underwent a remarkable metamorphosis, however, as they came on towards us, what with the explanations that our angel gave them. When they at last halted, but a few yards from the spot where we stood, every sign of hostility had vanished. It was patent, however, that they were wary, suspicious. That they should be so was, certainly, not at all strange. But just the same there was something that made me resolve to be on my guard whatever might betide.

The leader was a tall man, of sinewy and powerful frame. Though he had, I judged, passed the half-century mark, he had suffered, it seemed, no loss of youthful vitality or strength. His companion, tall and almost as powerful as himself, was a much younger man — in his early twenties. Their hair was long. The arms were bare, as were the legs from midway the thigh to halfway below the knee, the nether extremities being incased in cothurni, light but evidently of very excellent material.

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As for the companions of the twain, one was a girl of seventeen or eighteen years of age, the other a girl a couple of years older. Each had a bow and a quiver, as did our angel. Strictly speaking, it was not a quiver, for it was a quiver and bow-case combined, but what the ancients called a *corytos*. The older of these young ladies had golden hair, a shade lighter than the angel's, whilst the hair of the younger was as white as snow. At first I thought that it must be powdered, but this was not so. And, as I gazed with interest and wonder upon this lovely creature, I thought — of Christopher Columbus and Sir Isaac Newton. At thirty, they had hair like hers. That thought, however, was a fleeting one. This was no time, forsooth, to be thinking of old Christopher or Sir Isaac. Stranger, more wonderful was this old world of ours than even Columbus or Newton had ever dreamed it.*

The age of our angel, by the way, I placed at about twenty-

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*"Considering that the mean density of the whole earth is only about five and a half times that of water, and that the materials of which the crust of the earth is composed are all compressible in a greater or less degree, so that even at no very great depth the density of the different substances must be greatly increased by the mere pressure of the superincumbent materials, some philosophers have supposed that the effects of pressure must be counterbalanced by the expansive force of a great heat subsisting in the interior of the earth; and others that the earth is not solid, ***but merely a hollow shell*** of inconsiderable thickness."—Brande

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five years. And I wondered how they could possibly reckon time here in this underground world, a world that could have neither days nor months nor years.

The quartette listened eagerly to the explanations given by our angel. Suddenly the leader addressed some question to Persephone, as Rhodes called her. And then we heard it!

"Drome," was her answer.

There it was, distinct, unmistakable, that mysterious word which had given us so many strange and wild thoughts and visions. Yes, there it was; and it was an answer, I thought, that by no means put the man's mind at ease.

Drome! Drome at last. But— but what did it mean? Drome! There, we distinctly heard the angel pronounce the word again. Drome! If we could only have understood the words being spoken! But there was no mistaking, I thought, the manner of the angel. It was earnest, and yet, strangely enough, that Sibylline quality about her was now more pronounced than ever. But there was no mistaking her manner: she was endeavoring to reassure him, then, to allay, it seemed, some strange uneasiness or fear. I noticed, however, with some vague, sinister misgivings, that in this she was by no means as successful as she herself desired. Why did we see in the eyes of the leader, and in those of the others, so strange, so mysterious a look whenever those eyes were turned toward that spot where Milton Rhodes and I stood?

However, these gloomy thoughts were suddenly broken, but certainly they were not banished. With an acquiescent reply — at any rate, so I thought it — to the angel, the leader abruptly faced us. He placed his bow and arrow upon

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the ground, slipped over his head the balteus, from which the *corytos* hung at his right side, drew his sword — it was double-edged, I now noted — from its scabbard, and then he deposited these, too, upon the ground, beside his bow and arrow. His companion was following suit, the two girls standing by motionless and silent.

The men advanced a few paces. Each placed his sword-hand over his heart, uttered something in measured and sonorous tones and then bowed low to us — a proceeding, I noted out of the corner of my eye, that not a little pleased our angel.

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Chapter 23

THAT WE ONLY KNEW THE SECRET

"Well," remarked Milton Rhodes, his expression one of the utmost gravity, "when in Drome, Bill, do as the Dromans."

And we returned the bow of the Hypogeans, whereupon the men stepped back to their weapons, which they at once resumed, and the young women, without moving from the spot, inclined the head to us in a most stately fashion. Bow again from Rhodes and myself.

This ceremony over — I hoped that we had done our part handsomely — the angel turned to us and told us (in pantomime, of course) that we were now friends and that her heart was glad.

"Friends!" said I to myself. "You are no gladder, madam, than I am; but all the same I am going to be on my guard."

The girls moved to the angel and, with touching tenderness,

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examined her bleeding hand, which the younger at once proceeded to bandage carefully. She had made to bathe the hurt, but this the angel had not permitted — from which it was patent, I thought, that there would be no access to water for some time yet.

Our Amalthea and her companions now held an earnest consultation. Again we heard her pronounce that word Drome. And again we saw in the look and mien of the others doubt and uneasiness and something, I thought, besides. But this was for a few moments only. Either they acquiesced wholly in what the angel urged, or they masked their feelings.

I wished that I knew which it was. And yet, had I known, I would have been none the wiser, forsooth, unless I had been cognizant of what it was that the angel was urging so earnestly and with such confidence. That it was something closely concerning ourselves was, of course, obvious. That it (or part of it) was to the effect that we should be taken to some place was, I believed, virtually certain. Not that this made matters a whit clearer or in any measure allayed my uneasiness. For where were we to be taken? And to what? To Drome? But what and where was this Drome? Was Drome a place, was it a thing, was it a human being, or what was it?

Such were some of the thoughts that came to me as I stood there. But what good to wonder, to question when there could be no answer forthcoming? Sooner or later the answer would be ours. And, in the meantime — well, more than sufficient unto the day was the mystery thereof. And, besides, hadn't Rhodes and I come to find mysteries? Assuredly. And assuredly it was not at all likely that we would be disappointed.

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This grave matter, whatever it was, decided, the angel plunged into a detailed account of what had happened on the bridge. We thought that we followed her recital pretty closely, so expressive were her gestures. When she told how we had saved her from that frightful chasm, she was interrupted by exclamations, all eyes were turned upon us, and I felt certain in that moment that we were indeed friends. Still Heaven only knew what awaited us. It was well, of course, to be sanguine; but that did not mean that we should blink facts, however vague and mysterious those facts might be.

There was a momentary pause. When she went on, I saw the angel's lower lip begin to tremble and tears come into her eyes. She was describing the death of her demon, her poor, poor demon. Well, as regards appearances, I must own that I would greatly prefer that hideous ape-bat of hers to many a bulldog that I have seen. The others too looked distressed. And, indeed, I have no doubt that we ourselves, had we known all about demons, would have been — well, at least troubled. Little did Milton and I dream that the loss of that winged monster might entail upon our little band the most serious consequences. So, however, it was, as we were soon to learn.

When she had ended her account, the angel turned to us forthwith and went through an earnest and remarkable pantomime. She and the others awaited our answer with the most intense interest. But the only answer that we could give her was that we did not understand. That pantomime had been wholly unintelligible to Milton Rhodes and myself. I say wholly unintelligible; we could see, however, that it had some-

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thing to do with ourselves and something to do with *something* up above; but everything else in it was an utter mystery.

The angel went through it again, more slowly, more carefully and more fully this time. But still we could not understand.

"Perhaps," I suggested, "she could tell us with paper and pencil."

"Not a bad idea, Bill."

Thereat Rhodes produced pencil and notebook. These he gave to the angel, with a sign that she put it down in the book. She regarded the pencil curiously for some moments, tried it upon the paper, and then — with some difficulty and undoubtedly some pain, what with her hurt hand — she began. Rhodes moved to her right side, I to her left.

Yes, there could be no mistaking that: she had drawn the Tamahnowis Rocks. Then she drew a crevasse and two figures, plainly Rhodes and myself, going down into it. That was clear as the day. Then she put those figures that were Rhodes and I into the tunnel, and, presto, with a wave of the hand, she brought them down to that very spot where we were standing. Clear again, lovely Sibyl. What next? More figures, and more and more; and were they too coming down into the tunnel? Yes, at last it all was plain, at last we wise numskulls understood her.

Were we alone?

Rhodes made it clear to her that we were. But he did not stop there; he proceeded to make it clear to her that *we only* knew the secret. She was some time in understanding this; but, when she did understand it, what a look was that which passed across her lovely Sibylline features!

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"Great Heaven," said I to myself, "he's gone and done it now!"

The look was one of joy, the look of a soul triumphant. In a moment, however, it was gone; her features were only lovely, impassive.

But the thoughts and the feelings which that strange look of hers had aroused were not gone. I felt something like a shudder pass to my heart. Of a truth, this lovely woman was dreadful.

I glanced at Rhodes; I thought that even he looked grave and troubled. Well, so I thought, might he be.

I said nothing, however, until the angel had rejoined her companions. Then:

"There can be not the slightest doubt that they look with great fear upon the coming of people from that world above, a world as mysterious, I suppose, to them as this subterranean world of theirs is to us. And, now they know that they have the great secret also when they have you and me — well, Milton, old *tillicum,* I think it will indeed be strange if either of us ever again casts a shadow in the sun."

"It may be so, Bill," he said soberly. "I did not think of that when I told her. Still — well, who knows? Certainly not I. It is possible, indeed probable, it seems to me, that we may do them, *her,* Bill, a harsh injustice."

"I sincerely hope so."

That grave look left his face, and he smiled at me.

"And, besides, Billy, me lad, maybe we won't ever want to return to that world we have left — that world so full of ignorance, and yet so full of knowledge and science too; that world so cruel, and yet sometimes so strangely kind; that

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world so full of hate and mad passion, and yet with ideals and aspirations so very noble and lofty. Yes, who knows, Bill? It is possible that we may not want to return."

Was it significant, or was it purely casual? I could not decide. But Rhodes' gaze was now on the angel. And, whilst I stood pondering, she turned and signed to us that they stood in readiness to proceed.

She raised a hand and pointed down the cavern, in some subtle manner making it clear that she was pointing to something far, so very far away.

"Drome!" she said.

"Drome," nodded Milton Rhodes.

"Ready, Bill?"

"Ready," I told him.

And so we started.

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Chapter 24

WHAT NEXT?

FOR A MILE OR MORE, THE WAY LED amongst pillars and stalagmites. Oh, the wonders that we saw in that great cavern! The exigencies of space, however, will not permit me to dwell upon them. There is, I may remark, no deposition of sinter going on now; undoubtedly many centuries have rolled over this old globe since the drip ceased, perhaps thousands upon thousands of years. Who can say? How little can scientists ever know, even when their knowledge seems so very great, of those dim and lost ages of the earth!

"One thing that puzzles me," I remarked, "is that each of these Hypogeans has nothing but a canteen. So far as I can see, the whole party hasn't got the makings of a lunch for a ladybug. Can it be that we have not far to go, after all?"

"I think, Bill, that we'll find the way a long one. My explanation is that, on starting for the bridge, they disencumbered themselves of the provision-supply (if they were not in camp) so that, of course, they could make the greater speed. That the angel had a companion back there, we know. We know, too, that that companion — in all likelihood, it was one of the girls — went for help."

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"What on earth were they doing there, with the men off some place else?"

"I wish that I could tell you, Bill. And what was the angel doing up in the Tamahnowis Rocks? And all by her lovely lonesome? I wish that you would tell me that."

"I wish that I could. And that isn't the only thing that I wish I could tell you. What in the world are *they* doing *here?* And what at the Tamahnowis Rocks?"

"What, Bill, are we?"

"But women!" said I. "Our explorers don't take women along."

"Lewis and Clark took a woman along, Sacajaweah, and took her papoose to boot. And this isn't *our* world, remember. Things may be very different down here. Maybe, in this subterranean land, the lady is the boss."

"Where," I exclaimed, "isn't she the boss? You don't have to come down here to find a — a what do you call it? — a gynecocracy. Which reminds me of Saxe."

"What does Saxe say, sweet misogynist?"

"This, sweet gyneolater:

> "'Men, dying, make their wills,
> But wives escape a work so sad;
> Why should they make, the gentle dames,
> What all their lives they've had?'"

"Bravo!" cried Milton Rhodes.

And I saw the angel, who, with the older man, was leading the way, turn and give us a curious look.

"And that," said Rhodes, "reminds *me*."

"Of what?"

"Who is the leader of this little party? Is it that man, or is it our angel?"

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"I'd say the angel if I could only understand why *she* should be the leader."

At length we passed the last pillar and the last stalagmite. All this time we had been descending at a gentle slope. The way now led into a tunnel, rather wide and lofty at first. The going was easy enough for a mile or so; the descent was still a gentle one, and the floor of the passage was but little broken. The spot was then reached where that tunnel bifurcates; and there were the packs of our Hypogeans, or, rather, their knapsacks. There were five, one for each, the men's being large and heavy.

"You see, Bill?" queried Milton. "Evidently our little hypothesis was correct."

"I see," I nodded. "We have far to go."

"Very far, I fancy."

Also, in this place were the phosphorus-lamps of the Dromans, one for each. These were somewhat similar to the ones that Rhodes and I carried, save that the Droman lamps could be darkened, whereas the only way we could conceal the light of ours was to put them into their cylinders. As was the case with our phials, the light emitted by these vessels was a feeble one. Undoubtedly, though, they would remain luminous for a long period, and hence their real, their very great value. Beside the lanterns, oil-burning, of which the Dromans had three, the phosphorous-lamps were somewhat pale and sorry things; but, when one remembered that they would shed light steadily for months perhaps, while the flames of the lanterns were dependent upon the oil-supply, those pale, ghostly lights became very wonderful things.

"The light," I said as we stood examining one of these ob-

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jects, "is certainly phosphorescent. But what is that fluid in the glass?"

"I can't tell you, Bill. It may be some vegetable juice. There is, by the way, a Brazilian plant, called *Euphorbia phosphorea*, the juice of which is luminous. This may be something similar. Who knows?"*

Each of the Dromans took up his or her knapsack, and we were under way again. It was the right branch of the tunnel into which the route led us. That fact Rhodes put down in his notebook. I could see no necessity for such a record, for surely we could not forget the fact, even if we tried.

"We'll record it," said Milton, "certitude to the contrary notwithstanding. And we'll keep adding to the record as we go down, too. There's no telling, remember. It may not be so easy to find the way out of this place as it seems."

"You said," I reminded him, "that we may never want to return."

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*"One dark night, about the beginning of December, while passing along the streets of the Villa de Natividada, I observed some boys amusing themselves with some luminous object, which I at first supposed to be a kind of large fire-fly; but on making inquiry, I found it to be a beautiful phosphorescent Fungus, belonging to the genus Agaricus. . . . The whole plant gives out at night a bright phosphorescent light, of a pale greenish hue, similar to that emitted by the larger fire-flies, or by those curious soft-bodied marine animals, the Pyrosomae. From this circumstance, and from growing on a palm, it is called by the inhabitants 'Flor de Coco.' The light given out by a few of these Fungi in a dark room was sufficient to read by."—George Gardner.

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"And I say it again. But I say this too: we may be mighty glad indeed to get out!"

To which I added the quite supererogatory remark that it was clearly within the realm of possibility that we should.

Soon the slope of the passage was no longer gentle. An hour or so, and the descent was so steep and difficult that we had to exercise every caution and care in going down it. "Noon" found us still toiling down that steep and tortuous way. We then halted for luncheon. The Dromans ate and drank very sparingly, though this work gives one a most remarkable appetite. Rhodes and I endeavored to emulate their example. I am afraid, however, that it was not with any remarkable success. As it was, the lunch left me as hungry as a cormorant.

As we sat there resting, the Dromans held a low and earnest colloquy. The two girls, though, had but very little to say. The subject of the dialogue was an utter mystery to us. Only one thing could we tell, and that was that the matter which they were revolving was one of some gravity. Once and only once did we hear the word Drome.

Also, it was then that we first heard — or, at any rate, first made out — the name of our angel. We could not, indeed, at the time be certain that it was *her* name; but there was no uncertainty about the name itself — Drorathusa. Ere the afternoon was far advanced, however, we saw our belief become a certitude. Drorathusa. I confess that there was in my mind something rather awesome about that name, and I wondered if that awesome something was existent only in my mind. Drorathusa. It seemed to possess some of that Sibylline quality which in the woman herself was so indefinable and mysterious.

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Drorathusa. Sibylline certainly, that name, and, like the woman herself, beautiful too, I thought.

In our world, it would, in all likelihood, be shortened to Drora or Thusa. But it was never so here. No Droman, indeed, would be guilty of a barbarism like that. It was always Drorathusa, the accent on the penultimate and every syllable clear and full. Drorathusa. Milton Rhodes declared that it was the most beautiful name he had ever heard in all his life!

It was about four o'clock when we issued from that passage, steep to the last, and found ourselves in a great broken cavern. The rock was granite, the place jagged and savage-looking as though seen in some strange and awful dream.

Here we rested for a while, and I, for one, was glad enough to do so. I was tired, sore and stiff from head to foot — especially to foot.

Just by the tunnel's mouth, there was some writing on the wall. Before this, Drorathusa and the older man (his name, we had learned, was Ondonarkus) stood for some moments. This examination, and the short dialogue which followed it, left them, I noticed even more grave of aspect and demeanor than we had ever seen them.

I wondered what it could mean. I felt a vague uneasiness; a nameless foreboding was creeping over me.

It was futile to think and wonder what it meant, and yet I could not help doing it. Glad had I been to stop, but, strangely enough, glad I was to get under way once more. For 'twas only so that we could hope to get the answer.

Well, we got it — an answer that I wish never to know again.

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Chapter 25

THE LABYRINTH — LOST

WE SOON SAW THAT WE HAD ENtered not a cavern but a perfect labyrinth of caverns. I could never have imagined a place like that. It was bewildering, dreadful, forsooth, in the possibilities that it limned on the canvas of one's imagination. How in the world could any one ever have found his way through it? But somebody had, for there were the inscriptions and signs on the wall. For these the Dromans kept a keen watch, and the relief evinced whenever one was sighted showed what a frightful thing it might be to lose the way.

An hour passed, another, and still we were moving in that awful maze.

"Great Erebus," said I, "but this is confusion worse confounded. Do you think that we can ever find our way back through this?"

"I've got it all down here, Bill," returned Rhodes, tapping his notebook. "The angel, *the* leader now, is finding her way through it: what she can do can't we do also?"

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"She isn't through it yet! It is some time, too, since we saw one of those directions on the wall. The fact is, unless I am greatly mistaken, our Dromans are becoming uneasy right now."

"Think so, Bill? I confess that I thought something of the kind myself, but I was not sure that it wasn't only a fancy."

"I wish that I could believe so."

As Rhodes had remarked, Drorathusa was the leader now. And a striking sight it was — her tall white figure leading the way, the shadows quivering, swaying, rushing over the broken, savage walls and deepening to inky blackness in the secret places as we passed.

Farther and farther we went, deeper and deeper; but never another inscription was seen. The advance became broken, irresolute. Then suddenly there was a halt.

And at that instant the last vestige of uncertainty vanished: Drorathusa had lost the way.

There was a sudden panicky fear in the eyes of the girls, but it soon was gone. The little party met this most unpleasant truth with exemplary philosophy. There was a short consultation, and then we began to retrace our way. The object was, of course, to return to the last mark on the wall. If we missed it, then Heaven help us!

"Perhaps," I thought, "it will be Heaven help us, anyway!"

And it was.

We reached our objective without misadventure, and then a new start was made. Rhodes and I were greatly puzzled, for it was patent that neither the angel nor any one else knew how we had gone astray. And, not knowing that, how could any one tell which way to go?

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"Better get it clear in that notebook," I admonished Rhodes. "Maybe this new start will end up in something more unpleasant than the other did. It's a queer business, and I don't pretend to understand any of it at all."

We went along for a half-mile or so, carefully and with no little apprehension, and then, hurrah, there was a sign on the wall! The route to Drome again! But for how long?

Drorathusa quickened her pace. She was moving along now as though in confidence, certitude even. I have never been able to explain what followed. For a time, an hour or more, that confidence of hers certainly was fully justified. Then came the change. Suddenly we became aware of an unpleasant fact — there was something wrong again. Not that we remained in doubt as to what that something was which was wrong. A few minutes, and we had a fact even more unpleasant presented to our contemplation and incidentally cogitation — again we had gone astray.

Once more there was a consultation, and once more we retraced our steps — I mean we started to retrace them. Neither I nor any one else could tell how it happened. Not that I marveled at our failure to return, even though I could not explain just how we had missed the way. However, it was no longer possible to blink the fact that we were lost, utterly lost in this maze of passages, caverns and chambers.

I raised my canteen and shook it; my heart sank at that feeble wish-wash sound. The canteen was almost empty. Nor was any one of the others, in this respect, much more fortunate than myself.

Our position was a most unpleasant one — appalling even in the grisly possibilities which it presented to the mind.

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Chapter 26

THROUGH THE HEWN PASSAGE

I COULD SET DOWN NO ADEQUATE record of those hours which followed. It was late now, and yet on and on we went, mile after mile, deeper and deeper but only, it seemed, to involve ourselves the more hopelessly in the dread mysteries of that fearsome place. I wondered if it was my imagination that made it so, but certainly the confusion of those chambers and caverns seemed to become only confusion and the worse confounded.

At last and suddenly came the discovery.

We had entered a long and narrow chamber and were drawing near the end, Rhodes and I wondering if we should find an exit there. Of a sudden there was a sharp exclamation from the lips of Drorathusa, who was some little distance in advance — an exclamation that fetched me up on the instant.

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She had stopped and was pointing towards the left-hand wall, her attitude and the look upon her face such that I started and a sudden fear shot through me.

"What in the world can it be?" I said. "I see nothing but rock and shadows and blackness. What has she found?"

Milton Rhodes made no answer. He was moving forward. I followed. A moment, and he was beside the Dromans, his light turned full upon the wall.

"Look at that, Bill!" said he.

I moved to his side, and we stood there gazing, for some moments motionless and silent.

"Well, Bill," he queried at last, "what do you think of that? We are not the first human beings to stand in this spot."

"But probably many centuries have passed since any human being stood here," I said, "and gazed upon that entrance — went into it. I wonder what it leads to. Why should men have cut that passage into the living rock? In such a horrible place. And how do we know that it was made by men? In this underground world, there may be intelligent beings that are not men."

"Well, that is possible, of course," Milton nodded.

The entrance was about four feet in width by eight in height. Above it, there was some striking sculpturing, evidently work of a mystical character. Its meaning was an utter mystery to Rhodes and me, but not, I thought, to our Dromans. Very little dust had accumulated, though, as I have good reason to believe, many, many centuries had passed since that spot was abandoned to unbroken blackness and silence.

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Many were the pictures that came and went as we stood there and looked and wondered. Who had cut this passage into the living rock? In what lost age of a people now perhaps lost as well? And for what purpose had they hewn it?

"Well," I said to myself, "possibly the answer to that question awaits us there within."

Rhodes and I moved over to the entrance, and he sent the strong rays of his electric light into the passage.

"About fifty feet long," he observed, "and evidently it enters another chamber."

We started in. We had taken but a few steps, however, when we stopped and turned our look back to the Dromans.

"Not coming," said Rhodes.

Why did they stand hesitant, with that strange look in their eyes and upon their faces? Even the angel was affected. Affected by what? By the mere mystery of the place?

"I wonder what is the matter with them," I said. "Why are they staying out there? I tell you, Milton, I don't like this at all. What's the matter with them?"

"Superstitious dread or something, I suppose," returned Rhodes. "Well, it ill becomes a scientist to let superstition stay his steps, to turn back even if a black cat crosses his path; and so on we go."

And on we went into the passage. When we were nearly through it, I glanced back. The Dromans had not moved.

"Look here!" I said, coming to an abrupt stop.

"What is it now, Bill?"

"Maybe this is a trap."

"A trap? How can it be a trap?"

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"How in the world do I know that? But to me the whole business has a queer and suspicious look, I tell you."

"How so?"

"How so? Why, maybe they *brought* us to this hole. We don't know what's in there."

"Neither do they," Milton said.

"Maybe they *do*," I told him. "Maybe they aren't lost at all. Maybe it's all make-believe. Why don't they come in, too? What are they standing out there for, standing and waiting — waiting? What are they waiting for? Probably for their chance to steal away and leave us to our fate!"

"My gosh, Bill," said Milton Rhodes, "your imagination goes like a jumping-jack!"

"Heaven help us if that's what you think when a man would be cautious and watchful!"

"Cautious and watchful. Yes, certainly we want to be cautious and watchful. After all, there may be something in what you say.

"But," he added the next moment, "not much, I think. No, Bill. This is not a trap. There is no faking about it: the Dromans *are* lost."

"I don't like it," I told him. "Why don't they come on in?"

"Goodness knows, Bill. Why won't some people sit down to a table if the party numbers thirteen? And why should *we* stand hesitant? Suppose that they do plan to steal away from us. I don't believe it, but suppose that they do. What then? Are we going to run after them, like lambs after little Bopeep? Not I, old *tillicum*. If they are as treacherous a lot as that, the quicker we part company the better. For, sooner or later, their chance would come."

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"There may be something in that," I admitted. "Lead on, Macduff."

A moment or two, and we had stepped from the passage and out into a great and lofty chamber.

"Great Heaven!" I cried, my right hand going to my revolver. "What — what is that thing?"

Rhodes made no answer. He stood peering intently.

"Look out!" I cried, pulling out my weapon and drawing back towards the entrance. *"It's moving!"*

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Chapter 27

THE MONSTER

RHODES MADE NO RESPONSE. STILL he stood there, peering towards the end of the chamber. Then of a sudden, to my inexpressible surprise, he began moving forward — moving towards that monstrous thing which reared itself up out of the gloom and the shadows, up and up, almost to the very roof itself.

"What are you doing?" I cried. "I tell you, I saw it move!"

Rhodes paused, but he did not look back.

"It didn't move," he said. "How *could* it move? It must have been only the shadows that you saw, Bill."

"Shadows?"

"Just so — shadows."

He moved his light slowly back and forth.

"See that. A certain way you look at it, that thing up there seems to be moving instead of the shadows."

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"But what on earth can it be?" I asked, slowly advancing to his side. "And what is that white which, though so faint, yet gleams so horribly? It looks like *teeth.*"

"It is teeth," said Milton, whose eyes were better than mine. "But the thing, of course, is not animate. You just thought that you saw it move. The thing is simply a man-made monster, like the great Sphinx of the Pyramids, like the Colossi of Thebes."

We were moving toward it now.

"And look at all those horrors along the walls," I said, "dragons, serpents, horrors never seen on land, in the air or in the sea — at any rate, in that world we have left. And look there. There is a demon — I mean a sculptured demon. And that's what the colossus itself is — a monstrous ape-bat."

"Not so, Bill. See, it is becoming plainer and plainer, and it is unequivocally a dragon."

Yes; it was a dragon. And I wondered if a monster more horrible than this thing before us ever had been fashioned by the wildest imagination of artist or madman.

The dragon (not carven from the rock but made of bronze) crouched upon a high rock, its wings outspread. At the base of this rock, upon which base rested the hind claws of the monster, was a platform some twenty feet square and raised five or six feet above the floor of the cavern. In the front and on either side of this platform, there were steps, and, in the center of it, a stone of curious shape — a stone that sent a shudder through me.

And up above rose the colossal dragon itself, its scaly fore claws gripping the edge of the rock, twenty-five feet or so above the platform. The neck curved forward and down.

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The head hung over the platform, thirty feet or more up in the air — the great jaws wide open, the forked tongue protruding hungrily, the huge teeth and the huge eyes sending back the rays from our lights in demonical, indescribably horrible gleams.

"Talk about Gorgons, Chimeras and Hydras dire!" I exclaimed, and it was as though unseen things, phantom beings, so eerie were the echoes, repeated the words in mockery and in gloating. "Why should men create such a Gorgonic nightmare? And worship it — worship the monster of their own creating? Look at that stone there in the center of the platform. Ugh! The things that must have taken place in that spot! The thought makes the flesh creep and the blood itself turn cold in one's veins!"

"What a dark and fearsome cavern, after all, is the skull of man," said Milton Rhodes, "a place where bats flit and blind shapes creep and crawl!"

I turned toward him with a look of surprise.

"That from the man whom I have so often heard sing the Song of the Mind; that from a scientist, one who has so great an admiration for Aristotle, Hipparchus, Archimedes, Galileo, Newton and Darwin; from one who so often has said that the only wonderful thing about man is his mind and that that mind, in its possibilities, is simply godlike."

"And so say I again, Bill, and so, I am sure, I shall always say. In its possibilities, remember. But you shouldn't have had scientists only on your list; you should have added these at least: Homer, Plato, Saint Augustine, Cicero, Dante and Shakespeare, and, yes, poor old Job in his Land of Uz. But man is a sort of dual creature, a creature that achieves the

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impossible by being in two places at the same time: his body is in this the Twentieth Century, his mind is still back there in the Pliocene, with cave-bears, hyenas and saber-toothed tigers."

I uttered a vehement dissent.

"But 'tis so, Bill," said Milton Rhodes, "or at least back there beyond the year 1492. The world knows but one Aristotle, one Newton, one Archimedes, one Galileo, one Darwin, one Edison; but Heaven has sent the world thousands."

"I don't believe it. There are no mute, inglorious — Shakespeares."

"No; there are no mute, inglorious Shakespeares, no mute, inglorious Newtons: the world, this glorious *mind* that we hear so much about destroyed them."

"Or," said I, "they destroyed themselves."

"You are not making the mind's case any brighter, Bill, by putting it that way. Yes, the mind, the glorious human mind destroyed them and turned forthwith to grovel in the dust before monsters like this one before us — before Prejudice, Ignorance, Superstition and Worse."

"What a horrible piece of work, then, is man!"

"Take the average of the human mind," went on Milton Rhodes, "not the exceptions and those so brilliant and so wonderful, but the average of all the human minds in all the world today, from our Newtons — if we have any now — to your savage groveling in the dust before some fetish or idol made of mud; do that, and the skull of man is found to be just what I said — a dark and fearsome cavern, a habitat for bats and ghostly nameless things."

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"What a strange, a horrible idea!" I exclaimed.

"The world is proud of its Newtons now," said Rhodes. "But was it proud of them when they came? Whenever I see a man going into ecstasy over the wonders and the beauties and the glories of the human mind — remember, Dante was driven from his country — then I think of these words, written by the Philosopher of Ferney:

"When we reflect that Newton, Locke, Clarke, and Liebnitz, would have been persecuted in France, imprisoned at Rome, and burned at Lisbon, what are we to think of human reason?'"

"Alas, you poor, poor humans," said I, "you are only a breed of vile Yahoos!"

"Oh, don't misunderstand me, Bill. The mind of man is a fearful thing, but it is wonderful too, as wonderful as it is dreadful; and the more wonderful, perhaps, than it intrinsically is because of the very grossness and the very sordidness that it has to conquer. We are prone, some of us, to think the record of the intellect a shabby one; but, after all, the record is not, all things considered, so bad as it may seem at a first glance to be. It might have been better, much better; but we should rejoice that it is not worse, much worse; that the mind, the hope of the world, has made even the slightest advance that it has. Man, however, is on his way at last. And, with Science on his right hand and Invention on his left, he can not fail to conquer the ape and the tiger, to win to a future brighter even than the most beautiful of our brightest dreams."

"Well," said I, turning and seating myself on one of the steps, up which steps perhaps many victims had been dragged

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to sacrifice, "this is a fine time truly and a fine place indeed in which to discuss man and the glorious destiny that may await him, in view of the fact that some spot in these cursed caverns may soon be our tomb.

"And," I added, "there come the Dromans."

Never shall I forget that look of awe and horror upon their white faces when at last they stood there in a huddled group before, almost under, the great dragon. Rhodes had seated himself beside me, and it was obvious that this temerity on our part was a source of astonishment to the Dromans. What dread powers they feared the monster might possess, I can only conjecture; but I do know that we could never have induced even Drorathusa herself to thus, on the very steps of his altar, hazard the wrath of an offended deity.

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Chapter 28

I ABANDON HOPE

AT LAST MILTON AND I AROSE AND proceeded to examine carefully this chamber of carven horrors. By the altar, another passage was discovered. Like the great chamber itself and the passage by which we had entered, this tunnel had been hewn out of the living rock by the hand of man. It was some sixty feet in length and conducted us into a small but most remarkable grotto, or rather a series of grottoes. We advanced, however, but a little way there; a few minutes, and we were again in the hall of the dragon.

We continued, and finished, our examination of the place. Another passage was discovered, in the roof and leading, of course, to we knew not where. Then there were those stone horrors ranged along either wall; but I shall not attempt to

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describe those nightmare-monstrosities, some of which, by the way, had two heads.*

The Dromans had drawn back some distance from the altar, and all had sunk down to a seat upon the floor, all save Drorathusa.

Our examination ended, we moved toward the little group. Milton looked at his watch.

"Midnight," he said.

As we drew near, Drorathusa suddenly raised a hand and made a significant motion toward the entrance. Those seated rose from the floor with an alacrity that astonished me. Evidently they were very anxious to quit this chamber of horrors. Well, I confess that I was not sorry to do so myself.

"Shades of the great Ulysses," said I as we moved along in the rear, "are we going to keep up this wandering until we drop?"

"Just what I was wondering myself, Bill. I fancy, though, that our Dromans are beginning to think that a rest would not be inexpedient."

Inexpedient!

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*"The Chevalier d'Angos, a learned astronomer, carefully observed, for several days, a lizard with two heads, and assured himself that this lizard had two wills independent of each other, and possessing nearly equal power over the body, which was in one. When a piece of bread was presented to the animal, in such a manner that it could see it with one head only, that head wished to go towards the bread, while the other head wished the body to remain still."—Voltaire.

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Shortly after issuing from the passage, the party came to a halt, and Drorathusa, to my profound thankfulness, announced that the time for rest and sleep had come.

"Sleep?" said I to myself. "Who can sleep in such a place and at such a time?"

From his pack, Ondonarkus took a small silk-like bundle; like the tent that Captain Amundsen left at the South Pole,* one could have put it into a fair-sized pocket. The white-haired girl handed Ondonarkus the sort of alpenstock which she carried, and, lo and presto, there was a tent for the ladies!

Rhodes and I betook ourselves off to a hollow in the wall, where we halted and disposed ourselves for rest. This disposition, however, was a very simple affair: we simply removed our packs and sat down on the floor, the softness of which by no means vied with that of swan's-down.

I drank a little water, but it seemed to augment rather than to assuage my burning thirst. For a time I sat there, my aching body leaning back against the rock-wall, my fevered, tortured mind revolving the grisly possibilities that confronted us. Meditation, however, only served to make our situation the more appalling. With an exclamation of despair, I lay down, longing for sleep's sweet oblivion. At this moment Ondonarkus and the young man — whose name, by the way was Zenvothunbro — were seen approaching. They laid themselves down nearby, their lanterns extinguished.

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*See *In Amundsen's Tent,* by John Martin Leahy, in August Derleth's anthology called *The Sleeping and the Dead*, page 386.—Darwin Frontenac.

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We had shut off the electric lights, but our phosphorus-lamps, and those of the Dromans, shed their pale and ghostly light around.

Rhodes was sitting up, engaged in bringing his journal forward, as carefully and cooly as though he were in his library at home, instead of in this mysterious and fearful abode of blackness and silence, thousands of feet below the surface of the earth, far — though how far we could only guess — below the level of the sea itself.

When I closed my eyes, pictures came and went in a stream, pictures swaying, flashing, fading. The amazing, the incredible things that had happened, the things that probably were to happen — oh, was it all only a dream?

I opened my eyes and raised myself up on an elbow. I saw Milton Rhodes bent over his book, writing, writing; I saw the recumbent forms of the two Dromans, whose heavy breathing told me that already they slept; over there was the tent, in it the beautiful, the Sibylline Drorathusa and her lovely companions — and I knew, alas, that it was not a dream.

I sank back with an inward groan and closed my eyes again. Oh, those thoughts that came thronging! If I could only go to sleep! A vision of treachery came, but it was not to trouble me now. No; Rhodes was right: our Dromans *were* lost. If only those other visions could be as easily banished as that one!

Ere long, however, those thronging thoughts and visions became hazy, confused, began to fade; and then suddenly they were blended with the monsters and the horrors of dreams.

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It was six o'clock when I awoke. Rhodes was sitting up. He had, he told me, just awakened. One of the Dromans was stirring in his sleep and muttering something in cavernous and horrible tones. As I sat there and listened, a chill passed through me, so terrible were the sounds.

"I can't stand that!" I exclaimed. "I'm going to wake him up. It's time that we were moving, anyway."

"Yes," nodded Milton. "Surely, though, we'll find water today."

"Today? Where is your *day* in this place? It's night eternal. And for us, I'm afraid, it is good night with a vengeance."

"Aw, Bill, quit your kidding," was Rhodes' answer.

Now, the thing that I want to know is this: what can you do with a man like that?

Ere long we were again under way. My canteen was now as dry as a bone, and I tell you that I felt mighty sad. However, I endeavored to mask, since I could not banish them, those dark and dire forebodings. When we set forth, it was with the hope that we might find, and be conducted by it to safety, the road by which those old worshippers had journeyed to and from that hall of the dragon. But not a vestige of such a route could we discover.

Hours passed. On and on we went, deeper and deeper. Noon came. No change. No one had a drop of water now. Rhodes and I estimated the distance traveled since quitting the temple of the dragon at ten miles and the descent at something like four thousand feet. This estimate, or rather guess, may, however, have been wide of the truth. We were still involved in the maddening intricacies of the labyrinth.

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I confess that our situation began to assume an aspect that made my very soul turn sick and cold. Rhodes, however, divining perhaps what was in my mind, pointed out that we had not been lost very long! and that surely we would find water some place. A man, said he, in the equable temperature of this subterranean world, could live for quite a time without water. I have no doubt that a man could — if he were lying in bed. But we were not doing that; we were in constant motion. The arduous exercise that we were undergoing, our fatigue, the anxieties and fears that preyed upon the mind — each was contributing its quota to the dire and steady work of enervation.

No, I would fight against despair; but certainly I could imbibe no consolation, no strength, either mental or physical, from a deliberate blinking of facts. And one of the facts was that, unless we soon found water, ours would be that fate which has overtaken so many of those who have gone forth to search out the secrets of mysterious places.

During that halt for lunch — and what an awful lunch that was — Milton brought forward his journal, and Drorathusa, by means of pictures drawn in the book, made it clear to us that they would never have missed the route had it not been for the loss of their beloved demon. That, of course, made Rhodes and me very sorry; but, if the demon had not been killed, we certainly should have been even more sorry — and, I'm afraid, in a worse place than this in which we now found ourselves.

This strange intelligence, too, reminded me of grandfather Scranton's wonder as to how *his* angel and her demon had journeyed over rock, snowfield and glacier to the Tamah-

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nowis Rocks through that dense, blinding vapor. I understood that now; they were guided by the wonderful instinct of the ape-bat. How truly wonderful that instinct is, we were yet to learn. Little wonder that Drorathusa mourned the loss of her dear, beloved, her hideous demon!

The bat has in all ages been the personification of repulsiveness, gloom and horror; and yet it is in many ways a very wonderful creature. For instance, it can fly through intricate passages with ease and certitude *when blinded*, avoiding any obstacle in or across its way as though in possession of perfect vision. No marvel, therefore, that some scientists have declared that the bat must possess a sixth sense. The accepted explanation, however, is that the creature discovers the objects, in the words of the great Cuvier, "by the sole diversity of aerial impressions."

However that may be, this wonderful faculty is possessed by the great ape-bats of Drome. Not that it is for this that they are valued by the Dromans. It is because it is impossible for the ape-bat to get lost. It matters not how long, how devious, how broken, savage, mysterious the way; the demon is never uncertain for one single moment. And a singular feature of this most singular fact is that the creature does not have to retrace the route itself, and it does not matter what time has elapsed. It may be a month, years; it is all the same to the demon. He may return to the point of departure by the outward trail, or he may go back in a bee-line or in a line as closely resembling a bee-line as the circumstances will permit.

From this it may easily be inferred how greatly the Dromans value these dreadful, repulsive creatures. When ven-

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turing out into the "lands of shadows" or into the caverns of utter darkness, these beasts are simply invaluable. In the "lands of shadows," they never fail to give warning of the approach of the wild ape-bats, those wolves of the air, or of other monsters; whilst, in the dark caverns — into which the wild bats sometimes wander for considerable distances — a man, though he may be utterly lost himself, knows that his demon will guide him safely back to the world of light.

In other ways, however, save as veritable Cerberi, they are of little use, are, indeed, objects of disturst and not a little dread. For they are, as a rule, of a most savage and uncertain temper. Not that the owner fears attack upon himself, though instances are not wanting in which master or mistress has been set upon. To its owner, a demon is truly doglike; but other people had better be careful.

"Since the loss of a demon on such a journey as this may spell disaster, I wonder," I said, "why they didn't bring along more than one."

"Food, Bill, food," returned Rhodes. "I am no authority, of course, on demonian dietetics, but I don't imagine that they fed the monster on canary-bird seed."

On we went, blindly and in desperation, on and on and deeper and deeper into the earth. At length there was a change, whether for good or ill we could not know; but we welcomed it, nevertheless—simply because it was a change. At last we were emerging from the labyrinth. But what lay ahead?

Yes, soon we were no longer in a maze of caverns, grottoes, passages, but in a wide and lofty tunnel. We had made our way down it but a little distance when an inscription was

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discovered on the right-hand wall. The discovery was made by Rhodes, who happened to be in the rear. A rectangular space, perhaps three feet by six, had been hewn perfectly smooth, and upon this rock-tablet were many chiseled characters, characters utterly unlike any we had seen. Before this spot, we clustered in hope and questioning. It was at once patent, however, that our Dromans could make nothing whatever of the writing.

But we regarded this discovery as a happy augury, and we pressed on with a lighter step.

On to bitter disappointment.

Hours passed. We were still toiling down that awful tunnel.

At last — it was then nine o'clock — the way became very difficult. The rock has been broken, rent, smashed by some terrible convulsion. The scene was indescribably weird and savage. And there we halted, sank down upon the rocky floor. Rhodes and Drorathusa evinced an admirable nonchalance, but in the eyes of the others burned the dull light of despair. And perhaps, too, in my own. I tried to hide it, but I could not disguise it from myself — the numbing, maddening fact that I had abandoned hope.

For a time I lay watching Rhodes, who was writing, writing in his journal. How could he do it? Who could ever find the record? At any rate, even though found, it could never be read, for the finder would be a Droman. It made me angry to see a man doing a thing so absurd. But I bridled speech, curbed that rising and insensate anger of mine, rolled over, closed my eyes and, strange to say, was soon asleep.

But that sleep of mine was an unbroken succession of

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horrors, horrors at last ended by an awakening as horrible.

Once more I was in that hewn chamber, once more I stood before the great dragon. But we had been wrong: the monster was alive. Down he sprang as I turned to flee, sank his teeth into my shoulder, raised his head high into the air and shook me as a cat shakes a mouse.

Then suddenly I knew that it was not all a dream.

Teeth *had* sunk into my shoulder. I struggled madly, but the jaws only closed the harder. And, horror of horrors, the spot in which I had lain down was now in utter blackness.

Then I was wide awake: the teeth were Rhodes' fingers, and I heard his voice above me in the darkness:

"Not a word, Bill — unless guarded."

"What is it?" I whispered, sitting up. "And where are our phosphorus-lamps?"

"In their cylinders," was Rhodes' low answer. "We want to see without being seen, that is why. I can turn on the electric, of course, at any instant. Wish the Dromans had been nearer, on this side of that rock-mass; I would have darkened theirs too."

"Without being seen?" I queried. "In Heaven's name, Milton, what does it mean?"

"I don't know. Got your revolver handy?"

"Yes."

"Good! Keep it so!"

"But what is it?"

"Did you," said he, "notice that passage in the opposite wall, a few yards back?"

I whispered that I had.

'Well," said Milton Rhodes, "there is something in there. And it's coming this way!"

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Chapter 29

THE GHOST

WE WAITED, LISTENING INTENTLY; but the place was as silent as the tomb.

"What," I asked, "did you hear?"

"I have no idea, Bill, what it was."

"What were the sounds like?"

"I don't know."

"Were they loud or faint?"

"Faint — mysterious."

"Great Heaven," said I, "what can it be? How long since you first heard it?"

"Only a few minutes. I can't imagine why the sounds have ceased. It certainly was coming this way. I wonder if it has discovered our presence."

"In that case, we had better look out."

"Well, that is what we are doing."

"Hadn't we better wake the Dromans?"

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"I see no necessity for it. When the thing comes — it *was* coming, I know — they may be awakened suddenly enough. The men are farther from the passage of course, than we are, the ladies farther still. It must pass us before it can reach them; and we have our revolvers."

"Yes; we have our revolvers. But we don't know what's coming."

"There!" Rhodes exclaimed, his voice a whisper. "We'll soon know. Did you hear *that*?"

"I heard it. And there it is again!"

"It's coming, Bill!"

It *was* coming. What were we to see issue from that passage? I gripped my revolver and waited in a suspense that was simply agonizing. The sound ceased. It came again. It was a *pad-pad*. Once or twice another sound was heard. I thought that that one was produced by something *brushing along the wall*.

"Look!" I said, crouching forward. "Light!"

The rays grew stronger, casting long shadows — shadows swaying, shaking, crawling.

Then of a sudden the light itself appeared, and a tall figure came gliding out of the passage.

"Drorathusa!" exclaimed Milton Rhodes.

This sudden lurch from agonized suspense and Gorgonic imagination to glad reality left me for some seconds speechless.

"Well, well," laughed Milton Rhodes, pressing the button and flooding the place with light, "isn't imagination a wonderful thing?"

"But," said I, "what on earth does this mean?"

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"Look there, Bill, *look!*" cried Rhodes. "Look at that!"

Drorathusa was moving straight towards us, a strange smile on that beautiful Sibylline face of hers.

"What do you mean? Look at what?"

"The canteen! Look at her canteen!" cried Milton pointing excitedly.

Drorathusa stopped and raised the canteen, which was incased in canvas-like stuff. It was wet. Yes, it was wet and dripping.

"Water!" I cried, springing up and rushing toward her.

"*Narranawnzee!*" smiled Drorathusa, reaching out the canteen toward my clutching fingers.

Great Pluvius, how I did drink! I'd be drinking yet if Rhodes hadn't seized the vessel and wrested it from me.

"You must be careful, Bill," he said. "We mustn't drink too much at first."

And he raised the canteen forthwith and proceeded to swallow a couple of quarts.

"For Heaven's sake," I told him, "leave some for the others!"

"Yes," said Rhodes, handing the water to Drorathusa. "We have been kind of ungallant, Bill — hoggish, I'm afraid. But I was as dry as a burnt cork."

Ere he had ceased speaking, Drorathusa was moving toward her companions. How wonderful was that change, that rush from out the black depths of despair! And yet our situation was still truly a terrible one, for we were *lost*. But we did not think of that now. Water, water! We had water now and rejoiced as though we had been caught up and set down in the loveliest of all the lovely glades of Paradise.

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A few minutes, and we all (with tent and packs, with everything) were following Drorathusa through the passage, were hurrying toward that spring or stream or pool which she had discovered. What whim, what freak of strange chance had led that mysterious woman forth whilst others slept the sleep of despair, forth into that particular passage? Even now I do not know the answer.

After following its sinuosities for several hundred feet, we suddenly stepped out of the passage and into a great chamber. This, like our sleeping-place was weird and savage in the extreme. Broken rock-masses rose up, in all directions. There were distorted pyramids, fantastic pinnacles, spires, obelisks, even pillars, but they were pillars grotesque and awful as though seen in a dream.

Wider and wider grew the place, more and more broken and savage. Soon even the walls were involved in darkness. The roof, as we advanced, became more and more lofty. Clearly this cavern was one of enormous extent. I began to glance about with some apprehension. How had Drorathusa found her way into such a place — and out again? I marveled that she had not got lost. But she had not, and evidently there was no likelihood that that could happen. She was moving forward, into that place of savage confusion, with never a sign of hesitation, with the certitude of one following a well-beaten path.

Suddenly Drorathusa stopped, and, after making a sign for silence, she said, pointing into the blackness before us:

"Narranawnzee."

Narranawnzee. Yes, there it was, the faint murmur and tinkle of water.

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We hurried forward, the wall of the cavern emerging from out the darkness. And there it was, a large spring of the purest, coolest water gushing out from the base of the rock, to fall in a gentle cascade and then flow away to a great pool gleaming dark and sullen in the feeble rays that found their way to it.

It was near nine o'clock of the day following when we left that spot. Rhodes and I were smooth-shaven again; yes, he had brought along a razor, one of your old-fashioned, antediluvian scrapers. I actually believe that it was an heir-loom from the Man of Piltdown, or perhaps from the more ancient Pithecanthropus erectus himself.

Ondonarkus and Zenvothunbro too had gladly availed themselves of this opportunity to get rid of their beards, which, however, they had kept trimmed close with clippers. Your Droman has a horror of mustache, beard or whiskers.

As for the ladies, they were now radiant and lovely as Dians.

We were following the stream. An hour passed, another. We had advanced five miles or so and had descended probably half a thousand feet. And then we lost our guide; the stream flowed into a cleft in the rock, to burst forth again, perhaps, far, far down, in some black cavern that has never known, and indeed never may know, the tread of any human foot.

For some moments we lingered there, as though reluctant to quit the spot; and then, with a last lingering look at those pellucid waters, flashing dark and sullen, however, as the light moved from them, we pressed grimly on and soon were involved in a cavern so rugged and smashed that we

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actually began to despair of ever getting through it. But we did get through, to abruptly step out into a place as smooth almost as a floor. The slope was a gentle one, and we pressed forward at a rapid rate.

We had gone perhaps a mile and a half when Rhodes, who was walking in advance with Drorathusa, abruptly halted, cried out and pointed.

Something white was dimly visible off in the darkness. We moved toward it, the Dromans evincing a tense excitement. A cry broke from them, and they made a rush forward.

It was a mark upon the wall, a mark which they themselves had placed there.

We had found the way to Drome.

"And let us hope," said I to Rhodes in the midst of the rejoicing, "that we don't lose it again."

Drorathusa turned her look upon Rhodes and me and pointed down the cavern.

"*Narranawnzee,*" she said.

We understood that.

"*Narranawnzee,*" said we.

Again Drorathusa pointed.

"Drome," she told us.

That too we understood; that is, we thought that we knew when she meant by Drome.

It was a few minutes past seven (p.m.) when we reached the *narranawnzee,* a fine deep pool without any discoverable inlet or outlet, and there we halted for the "night."

In this spot, the Dromans had left a food-depot, and right glad were we to see this accession to the larder. There was also a supply of oil.

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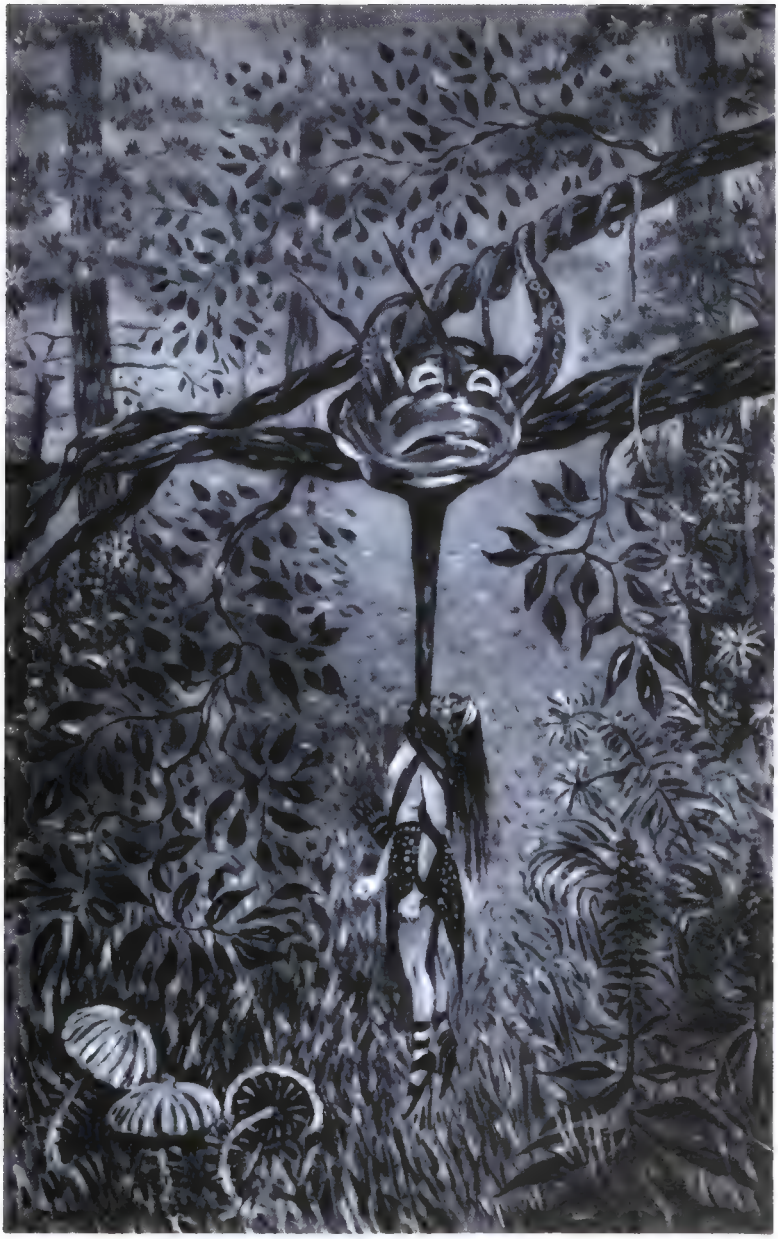

"How like the big face of a fat man!"

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That evening (I find it convenient to use these inaccurate terms) I fished out my journal and carefully brought it forward, up to the hour, to the very minute. I felt blithe as a lark, and so, indeed, did everybody else, everybody save Drorathusa, and even she was somberly happy.

I thought that our troubles were over!

Of a sudden Rhodes slapped down his journal and, to the surprise of the Dromans and, forsooth to my own, made a dive at an oil-container, which Ondonarkus had just emptied.

"At last—our depth, Bill" he cried.

And he proceeded to ascertain the boiling-point of water, the heat being furnished by Drorathusa's lamp and that of Silvisiris, the older of the young women. Nandradelphis, by the way, was the name of the other, the white-haired girl.

It was a strange, a striking picture truly—Milton Rhodes bending over his improvised hypogemeter, the Dromans looking on with curiosity, perplexity and with strange questionings in their looks.

At last Rhodes was satisfied with the result, that it was as near accuracy as the circumstances would permit.

"We are," said he after computing for some moments in his journal, "at a depth of a little more than twelve thousand feet. The exact figures are twelve thousand two hundred and sixty feet, though we can not, of course, claim for our determination any high degree of accuracy. I feel confident, however, that it is near the truth. Call it twelve thousand feet."

"Twelve thousand feet!" I echoed. "Below the level of the sea?"

"Yes, Bill; below the level of the sea."

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"Great Erebus, I knew that we had descended a long way, but I would never have believed that we had gone down over two miles. Two miles, and more, below sea-level. That is a record-smasher."

"Rather," Milton smiled. "Before us no man (of our sunlit world) had penetrated into the crust of the earth to a greater depth than three thousand seven hundred and fifty-eight feet below the level of the sea. That is the depth of the mine at St. John del Rey, Minas Geraes, Brazil."

"Two miles—over two miles down!" said I.

"And probably, Bill, we are only just getting started."

"But the pressure. We can't go down very far into this steadily increasing pressure, increasing in a geometrical ratio whilst the depth increases only in an arithmetical one."

"But," Milton said, "I showed you that there is something wrong with the law."

"Then how do you know that we have reached a depth of twelve thousand feet and over, if the law breaks down?"

"I don't believe that it has broken down yet. It will hold good for this slight descent which we have made. And, of course, if fact is found to coincide with theory, then our descent will be arrested at no great depth."

"And," I said, "unless the discrepancy between fact and theory is a remarkable one, we will have no means of knowing whether the law has broken down or not. For it is impossible, in this world of utter darkness, to make anything like an accurate estimate of the descent made good."

"We shall have no means of knowing, Bill, unless, as you say, truth and theory are remarkably divergent. Of course, in that case, we should not long remain unaware of

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the fact. Of the depth, then, we can not be certain; but the boiling-point of water will always give us the atmospheric pressure."

"That isn't what is worrying me," I told him; "it is the pressure itself."

"The pressure *itself*," Milton returned, "would produce no dire effects. It is not the diminuation of pressure that produces the dreaded mountain sickness, as was clearly shown by Dr. Paul Bert. Of educated people, nine hundred and ninety-nine out of every thousand will tell you that the acceleration of the pulse as one ascends to lofty heights, the short, troubled breathing, the disordered vision, extreme weakness, nausea, vertigo, bleeding at nose and lungs in short, all the symptoms of the terrible *mal des montagnes,* are caused by the diminution of the atmospheric pressure. The average human being (such is their explanation) having a surface of about fifteen square feet, sustains an atmospheric pressure of thirty thousand pounds; at an elevation of eighteen thousand feet, the pressure is but one half of that; is it any wonder, then, that a man gets mountain sickness?"

"Shades of ten thousand Gullivers," I exclaimed "do you mean to say that those nine hundred and ninety-nine are wrong?"

"Certainly they are wrong, so wrong as to cause Dr. Bert to write:

"'It is amazing to find a theory so plainly at variance with elementary physical laws accepted by eminent men.'"

"Well, well," was my sage remark, "I suppose the next thing on the programme will be the statement that it is

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not the fire that makes the pot boil; it is the heat; and that it is simply amazing to find a man who thinks that he has an iota of brains in his cranium entertaining the belief that it is the pot that boils."

"If it doesn't rain, Bill, tomorrow will be Monday. However, Dr. Bert (Professor in the Paris Faculty of Sciences) proved 'that the lessening of the barometric pressure,' to use his own words, 'it of no account, mechanically, in the production of the phenomena.' Yes, he proved that, to use his own words again, 'it is not the lowering of mechanical pressure that produces the symptoms, but the low tension prevents the oxygen from entering the blood in sufficient quantity.'

"Dr. Bert not only experimented on sparrows but entered the air-chamber himself. As the pressure was reduced, he experienced all the symptoms of mountain sickness.

" 'But,' he says, 'all these symptoms disappeared as by enchantment as soon as I respired some of the oxygen in the bag; returning, however, when I again breathed the air of the cylinder.'

"In one of his experiments, the pressure was reduced to 246 millimeters—9.7 inches.

" 'This,' he says, 'is exactly the pressure on the highest summit of the Himalayas — the same degree of pressure which was so near proving fatal to Glaisher and Coxwell; I reached this point without the slightest sense of discomfort, or, to speak more accurately, the unpleasant sensations I felt at the beginning had entirely disappeared. A bird in the cylinder with me was leaning on one side, and very sick. It was my wish to continue the experiment

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till the bird died, but the steam-pump, conspiring, as I suspect, with the people who were watching me through glass peep-holes, would not work, and so I had to return to normal pressure.'

"So you see, Bill, it is the low tension of the oxygen and not the diminished pressure that produces the distress and suffering and even death."

"All this is very interesting, but our problem is not one of rarefied air; the atmosphere *here* is *compressed.*"

"And, in compressed air," said Milton Rhodes, "it is the oxygen again that produces the symptoms. Subject a sparrow to a pressure of twenty atmospheres, and the bird is thrown into convulsions, stronger that those produced by tetanus or strychnine, convulsions which soon end in death. If pure oxygen is used, a pressure of only five atmospheres kills the sparrow. But, and mark this, if the air be deficient in oxygen, the pressure of twenty atmospheres does not produce even a tremor.

"So you see, Bill," Milton concluded, "we could descend to a very great depth in an atmosphere poor in oxygen."

"But how do we know that the atmosphere down there is poor in oxygen? It may be nothing of the kind. It may be saturated with it."

"Of course, we don't know. All we know is that we know nothing. And that reminds me of Socrates. That is what he said—that all he knew was that he didn't know anything. And Arcesilaus—Arcesilaus declared that Socrates didn't even know that much! However, hope is as cheap as despair. And, remember, here are our Hypogeans. They can ascend to our world, to a height of eight thousand feet

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above the level of the sea, and that, so far as we know, without suffering the slightest inconvenience."

"Something queer about that," was my comment.

"It *is* queer, Bill. However, we know that they can live in the (to them) rarefied air of our world: why, then, think that conditions down there, whether five miles down or fifty miles down, will prove fatal to *us?*"

On the following morning, we were under way at an early hour. The route led down a great tunnel; we could not have got lost now if we had tried. Shortly before noon, the welcome sounds of *narranawnzee* were heard, and there was a large stream gushing out of the wall. At times, as we advanced, the stream would move along dreamy and silent; then it would be seen rushing and glancing and again growling and foaming in lovely cascades.

Steadily, save for the noon halt, we toiled our onward and downward way. It was half-past seven when we halted —the eerie silence of the place broken by the soft, musical murmuring of the *narranawnzee.* Again Rhodes ascertained the boiling-point of water. It was 251° Fahrenheit. We were, therefore, under a pressure of two atmospheres; we had reached the depth of eighteen thousand five hundred feet. In other words, we were three miles and a half below the level of the sea!

It seems strange that I awoke, for I was dreaming the loveliest dream, a dream of fairy landscapes, birds and flowers, with lovely Cinderella (she looked very much like Drorathusa) in the midst of them. Nor do I know why I turned over onto my right side, for I was very comfortable as it was. But turn I did. And I was just going to

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close my eyes, to return to the dreamland of the fairies. But I did not close them. Instead, my heart gave a wild leap, and I opened my eyes wide. The next instant I was sitting up, straining my eyes as I looked into the darkness. Fear had its grip upon me, and I felt my hair begin to stand on end.

For there was something in that blackness, something visible, something *moving!*

Scarcely had my eyes fallen upon this amorphous, ghostly thing when it rose into the air, slowly and without the faintest sound. Up it rose and up, whilst I sat watching, immovable, speechless, as though in the clutch of some uncanny charm.

Up! Up to the very roof of the cavern!

Of a sudden there was a fearful change in its form. Then the ghost, now of monstrous shape, was coming down —*coming down straight towards me!*

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Chapter 30

THE MOVING EYES

I JERKED OUT MY REVOLVER; I reached over and gave Rhodes a shake that would have awakened Epimenides himself; then I grabbed the electric light and flashed it upon the descending monster.

I could scarcely believe my eyes. Nothing but the empty air. The monster had vanished.

"What's the matter?" came the sudden voice of Rhodes. "What in Paradise is going on now?"

I rubbed my eyes and stared upward once more.

"Look there!" said I, pointing. "Tell me, do you see nothing there?"

"There isn't anything there, Bill—*now*."

"But there was something there a second or two ago, and it didn't go away."

"Ergo it is still there," said Milton. "But, you see, it isn't. What did you see?"

"I wish I knew. I thought at first that it was a demon, phosphorescent or something. It was up there. I tell you it was up there. And it was coming down, coming down straight towards this very spot."

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"Great Caesar's spook!" exclaimed Rhodes.

"I can't understand," I told him, "where the thing went. It was there, and the next instant it wasn't. And yet it didn't go away."

"Turn off your light," Rhodes said quickly. "Turn it off, Bill."

"Great Zeus, what for? You'd better have your revolver ready."

"Revolver fiddlesticks! Off with it, Bill; off with the light!"

The light went off. And look! There it was again, and almost directly over us. It was not descending now but was hovering, hovering, as though watching, waiting. Waiting for what? And it seemed, too, to thrust out arms or tentacula. And look at that! Something started to drop from it—phosphorescence (I shall call it that) dropping to the floor, where it writhed and crawled about like a mass of serpents. Writhed and crawled and grew dimmer and dimmer, faded, faded.

We sat staring at this mysterious, inexplicable phenomenon in amazement, fascination and horror.

"What in the world can it be?" I asked, my voice a whisper.

"Who," returned Rhodes, "would ever have dreamed of such a thing as that?"

"I'm afraid," I told him, a shudder passing through me, "that our revolvers can't hurt a thing like that. It seems to be watching us. Look! Aren't those eyes—eyes staring at us, moving?"

"Eyes? Watching us? Eyes moving? Oh, Lord, Bill!" said Rhodes.

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"Then what is it? It's moving."

"Oh, it's moving. But it hasn't any eyes."

There was a momentary silence.

"As for sending a bullet into it," he added, "don't do anything so foolish."

He arose, stepped over and awoke Ondonarkus. The monster was still hovering over the spot. The Droman bestowed upon that ghost but a cursory, careless look, then yawned sleepily.

"Yam-yump!" said Ondonarkus, stretching himself.

Milton Rhodes laid a hand upon the other's shoulder and pointed an interrogative finger up in the direction of the phantom. The Droman gave a careless, airy toss of the hand.

"Drome," said he, then lay down again.

It was obvious from this monosyllabic answer, to say nothing of the manner of Ondonarkus, that there was absolutely nothing to apprehend from this mysterious apparation hovering above us. Certainly, though, there had not been any remarkable clarification. Indeed, in a way, Rhodes and I were more puzzled than ever. Drome, Drome. What could be the meaning of that word? Drome.

"It seems, Bill," said Rhodes, "that we are on our way to a very strange place. As for that ghost up there, it must be a fragment, as it were of the *light* of this subterranean land."

"Suppose it is—a harbinger, so to speak—then what, in the name of wonder, can that light be?"

"That, of course, we can not tell. It may be phosphorescent or auroral, or its origin may be one of which no man of our own world ever has even dreamed. I believe that I

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forgot to mention, when we were speaking of this the other day, that even human beings sometimes evolve light.* One thing, however, is certain: there is light somewhere in this underground world. And I believe, Bill, that we are drawing near to it now."

"I certainly hope that we are. But look at our ghost. It is moving again—thank Heaven (even if it is only a mass of light) away from us."

"Yes," said Rhodes. "But look down there. There is another one coming."

It came, and another and another. I don't know how many. On they came through the cavern, now lingering, now hovering; on they passed like some unearthly, ghostly procession. And, even though one knew that these phantoms, so dim and so misty, were perfectly innocuous, were as natural (as though there is anything that can not be natural!) as the light of the firefly, as the glow of the auroral arches

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* "A very decided luminosity has been observed to proceed from dissecting-room subjects, the light thus evolved being sufficient to render the forms of the parts (which are peculiarly bright), almost as distinct as in the daylight. . . . Three cases are recorded by Sir H. Marsh, in which an evolution of light took place from the living body. . . . The light in each case is described as playing around the face, but not as directly proceeding from the surface; and in one of these instances, which was recorded by Dr. D. Donovan, not only was the luminous appearance perceptible over the head of the patient's bed, but luminous vapours passed in streams through the apartment."—Dr. Carpenter.

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and streamers—all the same, I say, the sight of that spectral company, passing, passing, was one indescribably strange and uncanny.

However, a man can get used to anything. I got used to them and ere very long was asleep once more. In the morning, not a single ghost was to be seen. Nor did we see one until near midafternoon. That ghost was all by its lonesome and so dim that it vanished when our lights drew near. But soon they were about us in all directions. One of these phantoms, large, amorphous, writhing (its light so strong that it was bright in the rays of the lamps but not of the electric ones) came crawling along, swaying and shaking, straight toward us. Rhodes and I, as if by instinct, moved over so as to miss it; but Drorathusa and the others walked right into it. As they emerged from the spectral, phosphorescent cloudlet, the light clung to them like wraiths of fog, to be slowly dissipated as they advanced in little streams and eddies behind them.

It was during this afternoon, too, that Rhodes made the first discovery of animal life in this fearsome place—little fish, like those in the Mammoth Cave, totally blind. But, though they could not see, they could *feel* the light. When the rays fell upon the stream, they would drop to the bottom and seek the concealment of the shadow-places. Poor little blind things! What an existence! And yet how like them, after all, are we poor humans! How often have I thought of these sad words of Dr. Whewell's:

"It is not necessary here to inquire why those faculties which appear to be bestowed upon us for the discovery of truth, were permitted by Providence to fail so signally in answering that purpose."

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Yes, blind are we, though we have eyes; our souls shrinking from the light to wander, lost and happy and doubting and fearful, in psychic caves and labyrinths more terrible even sometimes than this cavern through which we were making our way—making our way to we knew not what.

We journeyed on until about seven o'clock, when we reached another depot, and there we halted for the night. All were much fatigued, but the Dromans were in high spirits, and ours rose, too. Whether we were drawing towards the end of our strange journey was not clear; but there could be no doubt that a great change was imminent.

To the surprise of Rhodes and myself (nothing in the place seemed to surprise Drorathusa and her companions) not a single light-wraith was anywhere to be seen. The cavern was as black as the deepest pit in Erebus.

And it was still the same when we awoke. How I would have welcomed the appearance of the faintest, loneliest ghost, as we called the small apparitions of light.

We noticed that Ondonarkus and Zenvothunbro, and the ladies also, were at some pains to have their bows in such a position that they could be drawn at an instant's warning. Ondonarkus saw us watching, and, sweeping a hand toward the darkness before us, he said:

"Loopmuke."

That, as we well knew, is the Droman word for ape-bat. Also, he tried to tell us about something else; but the only thing intelligible to us in his pantomimic explanation was that it was about a creature even more formidable than a wild *loopmuke*.

It was with keen anticipation on the part of Rhodes and myself that we set out that morning. For an hour or so,

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there was no change. Not a single light-wraith had shone in the awful blackness. Then, after passing through a particularly broken and tortuous place, we began to see them. Not many, however, and all were small and faint. Another hour passed, and of a sudden the walls drew together, and the roof came sloping down, down and down until we had to go bended over. Narrower and narrower grew the way, crowding us at last to the water's edge and then into the very stream itself.

Drorathusa and Ondonarkus were leading, Rhodes and I bringing up the rear. Fortunately the current was a gentle one; had it been otherwise, the place would have been simply impassable.

"I certainly," said Milton at last, "admire the man (maybe he was a woman) who first came through this awful place."

The next moment he made a rush forward. Nandradelphis, the white-haired girl, had slipped out into deep water. Rhodes caught her just in time to save her from immersion and drew her back to the shallow water by the wall. Not a cry, not the faintest sound had escaped her, and now she only laughed. Beauty was not the only admirable quality that these Droman ladies possessed.

For ten minutes or so, we toiled our way down that tunnel, now hugging the wall, now following the shallows out into the stream and at times to the other side. Then of a sudden there was an exclamation from Drorathusa, and the next moment we had issued from the tunnel and the stream and found ourselves in a great lofty cavern.

"Great Rameses!" I exclaimed as we stepped forth. "Look at those things."

Rhodes, I found, had already halted and was gazing up

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at them—two colossi, one on either side of the mouth of the tunnel. These carven monsters (we were, of course, standing between their bases) were seated, and one was a male, the other a female. They had not been fashioned *in situ* but clearly had been brought to the spot in sections. But how had those massive pieces of rock, the smallest of which weighed tons, been raised into their places? Who can tell? It remains, and probably always will remain, one of the mysteries of that lost and mysterious land.

We were getting rather used to strange things now: but, so remarkable were these great statues, for some minutes we lingered there before them.

The Dromans had moved on. We followed, to find ourselves in a few moments before a monstrous carven human head. There was the great pedestal, and there, lying face upward before it, was the great head, that and nothing more.

"Poor fellow," said I as we walked around the caput, "where is the rest of him? And why did they leave the head lying here like this?"

"I have an idea," Milton returned, "that there was no rest of him, that this head was all that was to be placed upon that pedestal."

I suppose that Rhodes was right. One wonders what happened there so long ago, why the great caput was never raised to the place which they had prepared for it. No man can tell that now. All we know is that there the great head lies, that there it has lain for, in all probability, untold thousands of years.

At last Milton Rhodes climbed up and stood upon the chin, in order, as he said, "to get a good view of the poor

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gink's phiz." And not only that, but he stood upon the poor fellow's nose; yes, he balanced himself on one foot on the very tip of it.

I turned my look to the Dromans with some apprehension, for I did not know what superstitious ideas they might entertain, feared that to them this acrobatic stunt of Rhodes might be sacrilege itself. My misgivings, however, were groundless. The Dromans were delighted, They burst into merry laughter; they applauded vociferously. Even Drorathusa laughed outright.

Little wonder, forsooth, for a pretty figure Milton Rhodes made balanced up there on the poor gink's olfactory protuberance. A fine posture truly for one of the world's (I mean, of course, our world's) great scientists; and I could not help wondering what certain dignified old fellows (Milton called them fossils) would have thought could they, by television or some miracle, have seen him there. And what would the Dromans themselves think? Well, I was glad when he came down and there was an end to that foolishness.

And I put in a prompt remonstrance.

"We," I told him, "have—or, at any rate, we *ought* to have—a certain dignity to uphold. For we are the representatives, as it were, of that great sunlit world above, the world of Archimedes, Kepler, Galileo, Newton, Humboldt, Darwin, Edison—not a world of Judys and Punches."

"Aw, Bill," was the answer that I got, "now quit your kidding."

I ask you this again: what can you do with a man like that?

We soon quitted the spot. The light-cloudlets were all

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about us now. Some came slowly gliding, some crawling, along the floor; some along the walls and the roofs. Others floated along overhead or hung motionless in the air. The changes of form were sometimes very rapid and certainly as unaccountable as the masses themselves. Occasionally we would see a mass slowly take form in the darkness and as slowly fade into darkness again. Where did the light come from, where did it go? And the explanation of this uncanny phenomenon? Undoubtedly some electric manifestation, said Rhodes, analogous perhaps to the light of the aurora. That, I objected, really explained nothing, and Rhodes admitted that that was just what it did explain—nothing.

Which reminds me of the beautiful eclaircissement which Professor Archimedes Bukink gave when the little girl to whom he was reading a fairystory asked:

"But what is that flamingo thing?"

"*Phoenicopterus ruber,*" said Bukink!

The spirits of the Dromans rose higher as we toiled our way onward and down. They quickened their pace, and, as we swung along like soldiers marching, they suddenly broke into a song or rather chant, the wonderful contralto voice of Drorathusa leading, the sounds coming back from the dark secret places of the cavern in echoes strange and sweet as voices heard in fairyland.

The light-masses were steadily increasing in number and volume. Especially was this pronounced in the great chambers. Fungoid growths were seen, coleopterous insects and at last a huge scolopendra of an aspect indescribably horrible. From this repulsive creature, the Dromans and myself drew back, but Milton Rhodes bent over it in a true scientific scrutiny and ecstasy.

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"Look, Bill, look!" he cried suddenly pointing, "Look at that. The body has thirty-five somites or segments."

"Thirty-five segments?" I queried, scratching my head and wishing that the scolopendra was in Jericho. "What is there so wonderful about that?"

"Why," said he, "in the Scolopendridae of our own world, the segments of the body never exceed twenty-one. And this one has thirty-five. Really, Bill, I must keep so remarkable and splendid a specimen."

"Great Gorgons and Hydras! Keep it? Don't touch the horrible thing. It may be venomous, deadly as a rattlesnake. And, besides, you'll have plenty of time to collect specimens, and probably some of them will make this one look like the last rose of summer. Leave the hideous thing alone. Why, the Dromans will think that you are dippy. Fact is, I believe that they are beginning to think so already."

"Let 'em!" said Rhodes with true philosophic indifference. "People thought that Galileo was crazy, and Newton and Darwin; Columbus was *non compos mentis,** Fulton was dippy, and Edison was looney. Yes, at one time the great inventor bore the beautiful sobriquet of Looney Edison. Listen to me, Billy, me lad: the greatest compliment that a scientist can ever receive is to be called a sap by sapheads."

All that, I admitted, was very true and truly cogent in its place; but this was not its place, and the Dromans

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* "The very children, it is said, pointed to their foreheads as he passed, being taught to regard him as a kind of madman."—Irving.

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certainly were neither sapheads nor saps. To my relief, and, indeed to my surprise, I dissuaded him from taking the thing as a specimen, and on we went once more.

At length we left the stream, which went plunging into a most fearsome place, into which no man could even dream of following it. Soon after that, the descent became very steep. The going, however, was good, and we went down at a rapid rate. This lasted for two or three hours, and we had descended many hundreds of feet. The slope then suddenly became gentle, and we were making our way through a perfect maze of tortuous galleries and passages, which at times opened out into halls and chambers.

The light was no longer in masses but in streams—streams that crawled and shivered and shook, as though in it spirit-things were immersed and were struggling to break from it. The fungal growths were everywhere now. There were mushrooms with pilei bigger than umbrellas. Shapes as grotesque as if seen through the eyes of madness. There were growths, too, that one could almost think beautiful, and masses hideous and slimy as so many octopi. A strong and most unpleasant odor filled the place. And here and there, almost everywhere in the strange fungoid growth, were things creeping, crawling—things for which I can find no name, and for some of them I am glad that I can not.

It was a weird scene, an indescribable scene, one horrible, mysterious and yet strangely wonderful too. A place gloomy and weird as any ever conceived by Dante or Doré. And through it human forms were moving, and its stillness was broken by human voices raised in song; and, moving with those human beings, those inhabitants of a world as alien

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as that of Venus or of Mars, were Rhodes and I, we two modern men from the great modern world above—the wonderful, the awful world of the sun.

Of a sudden an exclamation rang out—an exclamation that stilled the song on the instant, brought the party to an abrupt halt and the bow of Ondonarkus and that of Zenvothunbro from the cases.

The exclamation had broken from Rhodes; he was pointing into the gloom off to our right, a tense, expectant look on his face.

I peered with straining eyes, but I could see nothing there. A few moments passed, and still nothing was seen. I then turned to Rhodes to ask him what it was; but the words I was about to speak were never uttered. Instead, I gave something like a cry and whirled round. For a sound had come from out the fungoid growth and the darkness behind us, a sound as if of a slimy thing moving, slipping.

Nothing, however, was to be seen there, and silence, utter silence, had fallen upon the spot—silence abruptly broken by another exclamation from Milton Rhodes.

"Great Heaven!" I cried as I whirled back to the direction in which he was pointing. "They are all around us!"

"Look, Bill—*look at that!*"

I saw nothing for a second or two. And then, off in the darkness beyond the reach of our lights, the darkness itself was moving—yes, the very darkness itself.

"See that, Bill?"

I saw it. And the next instant I saw two great eyes, eyes that were watching us. And those eyes were moving.

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Chapter 31

"GOGRUGRON!"

THEY WERE VISIBLE FOR A FEW seconds only—those great eyes burning with a greenish fire.

"Where did they go?" exclaimed Rhodes.

"And," said I, "what can it be? An ape-bat?"

"That is no ape-bat."

He turned to Ondonarkus.

"Loopmuke?" he queried.

No; it was not a *loopmuke*. But what it was neither Ondonarkus's pantomime nor Drorathusa's could tell us.

"I don't think it's as bad as that. But the Dromans are know what it is themselves."

"There!" I cried, whirling round. "Did you hear that, Milton? There's that other thing again—that thing behind us!"

"I heard nothing."

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"I heard something, I tell you. That mystery with the eyes is not the only thing that is watching us, watching us and waiting."

Some moments passed, perhaps minutes, in expectant watching, our glances incessantly darting about the cavern, through which the light-mist was moving in troubled, writhing streams, the nebulous, spectral glow of it seeming to enhance the fearsome gloom of that dreadful place.

"I see nothing," Rhodes said at last, "and the cavern is as silent as a tomb."

"But we are *seen.* And, if we don't get out of this, it may be *our* tomb."

"I don't think it's as bad as that. But the Dromans are signing to us to come on—let us hope to a place more pleasant that this one."

I had turned to quit the spot, my look, however, lingering in that direction whence had come those low, mysterious sounds, a direction right opposite to that in which the moving eyes had shone. And scarcely had I taken a step forward when I fetched up, cried out and pointed.

"See that! See it moving?"

A large fungus-tree, its form one indescribably grotesque, was quivering. It began to shake violently. Some heavy body, hidden from our eyes, was moving there, and it was moving toward us.

Of a sudden the tree was thrust far over, there was a squshy, sickening sound, then down it came, the spot where it fell involved in a cloud of phosphorescence, which thinned and faded in the air like dust or mist as it settles.

"Shades of the Gorgons," I cried, "what is in there?"

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A sound from Milton Rhodes turned me round on the instant.

"The eyes again!" he cried. "There they are. See them? Have we at last got into Dante's Inferno itself?"

I was beginning to think that we had got into something worse.

Yes, there the eyes were, and they were nearer this time. But that was all we saw, eyes and nothing more. The thing itself was hidden in the fungoid growth and the shadows.

Rhodes raised his revolver, rested it on his left arm, took careful aim and fired.

The report seemed to bellow like thunder through the cavern. There was a scream from the Dromans, none of whom, save Drorathusa, had ever heard a firearm before; and I doubt that even Drorathusa knew what had killed her demon. On the instant, whilst the report of the weapon and the cry of the Dromans were ringing in our ears, came another sound; it was a shriek, high, piercing, unearthly, one that seemed to arrest and curdle the very blood in our hearts.

It sank, ceased. But almost instantaneously it came again; it rose until the air seemed to quiver to the sound.

The effect upon the Dromans was most sudden and pronounced.

A nameless fear, and something worse, seized upon me as I saw it.

They started from the spot as if in a panic, signing to us with frantic gestures to follow.

I started; but Rhodes, for some inexplicable reason, stood there, his look fixed on the spot whence came those

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demoniacal shrieks. The eyes had disappeared, but in almost that very instant that I turned, they shone again. I gazed at them as though in fascinated horror, forgetting for the moment that there was something behind me.

Up the eyes rose. A black thing was visible there in the darkness, but its shape was amorphous, mysterious. Up the eyes rose, seeming to dilate, and the fire in them grew brighter and brighter, became so unearthly that I began to wonder if I were going insane. The eyes swayed, swayed back and forth for some moments, then gave a sudden lurch into darkness. The shrieks broke, then came again, more horrible, if that were possible, than before.

"Come on!" I cried, starting. "For Heaven's sake, Milton, let's get out of this, or I'll go mad!"

"What in the world," said Rhodes, reluctantly turning to follow, "can that thing be?"

"Let's get out of this hellish place. Let's do it before it's too late. Remember, there is something *behind us*. Maybe monsters in other directions too."

"Well," said Rhodes complacently as he followed along in my wake, "we have our revolvers."

"Revolvers? Just see what your revolver has done. A revolver is only a revolver, while that thing—who knows what that monster is?"

"The Dromans know, or at any rate, they think that they do."

"And look at the Dromans. Fear has them. Did you ever see fear like that before? See how they are signing to us to come on. Even Drorathusa is shaken to the very soul."

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"After all, 'tis no wonder, Bill, that she is. Those shrieks! How can it continue to shriek and shriek like that?"

Ere long we had come up with the Dromans, who at once quickened their pace. On we went, casting apprehensive glances into the gloom about us. Those frightful sounds sank as we moved onward. They became faint, fainter still, and at last, to my profound thankfulness, they were no longer to be heard, even when we paused to listen.

"If that," said I during one of those pauses, "is a good sample of what we are to have here in Drome, then I wish that, instead of coming down here, I had stepped into a den of cobras or something."

Drorathusa's eyes were upon me. As I ceased speaking, she raised a hand and pointed in the direction whence we had come.

"*Gogrugron!*" she said.

And I saw fear and horror unutterable well up in her eyes as she said it.

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Chapter 32

"LEPRAYLYA!"

STEADILY WE MADE OUR WAY along and downward. The light-streams were increasing in volume, the luminosity becoming stronger and stronger, the vegetation more abundant, the weird shapes larger and more unearthly than ever. The silence was broken by the drone of insects—creatures meet inhabitants, forsooth, for a place so indescribably strange and dreadful.

The cavern we were following was very tortuous, our route even more so, what with the twists and turns which we had to make in order to get through that phantasmagoria of fungal things. I do not mean to say that all of those growths were horrible, but most of them were, and some were as repulsive to the touch as they were to the sight.

As we toiled our way through them, my heart was replete

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with dire apprehension. I could not banish the vision of those great burning eyes, the horror of those shrieks, which perhaps were still ringing out. What if we were suddenly to find ourselves face to face with one of those monsters (or more than one) here in this nightmare-forest?

Gogrugron! Gogrugron! What in the world was that monstrosity known to the Dromans as a *gogrugron?* Well, most certainly, I was not desirous of securing firsthand knowledge, upon that interesting item, for the great science of natural history.

At length the light no longer lay in streams and rifts in the darkness, but the darkness, instead, lay in streams through the light. The Dromans quickened their already hurried pace, and there were exclamations of "Drome! Drome!"

"Drome!" echoed Milton Rhodes. "I wonder what we are going to find."

"Something wonderful," said I, "or something worse, perhaps, than anything that we have seen."

Rhodes laughed, and I saw Drorathusa (Ondonarkus was leading the way) turn and send a curious glance in our direction.

"Well," I added, "anything to get out of this horrible forest of fungi and things."

Some minutes passed, perhaps a half-hour, perhaps only fifteen. Of a sudden the great tunnel, now as light as a place on a sunless day, gave a sharp turn to the right; a glad cry broke from the Hypogeans.

"Drome! Drome!" they cried.

We all hurried forward.

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"Look!" I said as we reached the turn. "The mouth, the mouth! *The tunnel ends!*"

There, but two hundred feet or so away, was the great yawning mouth of it; nothing was visible through that openings, however, but light, pearly, opalescent, mystic, beautiful.

"Drome!" cried Nandradelphis, clapping her hands.

A few moments, and we were standing at the entrance and gazing out over the weird and beautiful scene.

"Drome!"

I turned at the sound and saw Drorathusa, her figure and mien ineffably Sibylline and majestic, pointing out over the strange landscape, her eyes on the face of Milton Rhodes.

"Drome," she said again.

"Drome," echoed Milton.

"I wonder, Bill, what this Drome really is. And I have an idea that this is only the outskirts that we see. Can we at last be near our journey's end, or is that end still far away?"

"Who can tell? This place seems to be a wilderness."

"Yes; a forest primeval."

"What," said I "are we destined to find down there?"

"Things stranger, Bill, in all likelihood, than any explorer ever found anywhere in that strange world above us."

"No *gogrugrons,* I hope."

Rhodes laughed.

"Gogrugron!" said Drorathusa.

And I saw that horror and fear again in her eyes.

The cavern had come out high up on a broken, jagged

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wall, which went beetling up for hundreds of feet, up to the roof, which arched away over the landscape before us. We were fully half a thousand feet above the floor, which was a mass of luxuriant forest. Glimpses were caught of a stream down to the left, possibly the one which we had followed for so long. I judged the place to be over a mile wide; Rhodes, however, thought that it was perhaps not quite a mile in the widest part. Down this enormous cavern, the eye could range for three or four miles, at which distance the misty light drew its veil over the forest, the dark walls, and the roof arching across.

At times the light quivered and shook and there were strange flickerings, and dartings of opalescent streaks through it—streaks ineffably beautiful and yet, strangely enough, terrible too, terrible as the blades of plunging swords in hands savage and murderous.

Once more Drorathusa raised a hand, and this time she pointed into the misty distance.

"Le-prayl-ya!" she said.

Again her eyes were on Milton Rhodes, and, as she spoke that name, I saw in those wondrous orbs of hers one of the strangest looks that I have ever seen. I wondered if Rhodes too saw it. I found his eyes upon Drorathusa, but there was in them so abstracted an expression that I believed his thoughts were far away and that he had not noticed. When I turned to Drorathusa again, it was to find that that strange look was gone.

What a fascinating and mysterious creature this woman was!

"Lepraylya," she said again.

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"Lepraylya," Milton nodded.

He looked at me.

"I wonder who or what this Lepraylya can be, Bill."

"King maybe."

"Queen, I hope," said Milton Rhodes.

He drew forth his notebook and pencil and handed them to Drorathusa, pronouncing as she took them that mysterious name:

"Lepraylya?"

A few strokes with the pencil, and Drorathusa had given us the answer.

"You see, Bill?" said Rhodes, smiling. "A woman. In all likelihood, too, the queen."

Drorathusa's Sibylline look was upon him once more—and *she* did not smile.

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Chapter 33

FACE TO FACE

WE FOUND THE WALL EVEN MORE broken and difficult than it had appeared from the entrance. It was almost destitute of vegetation, a circumstance that contributed not a little to the slowness of the descent. Indeed, making our way down over those pitching naked rocks was a ticklish, an unpleasant business, I want to tell you; at times it was really precarious.

We had halted to rest above one of these difficult spots, and every one was either seated or leaning against the rock, when of a sudden Milton, who was nearest the edge, arose and pointed, pointed down and off to the right.

"Hello!" said he. "What's that?"

All of us arose, moved over and looked.

"Where?" I asked.

"Down there by that strange clump of cycadaceous trees,

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that clump near those tall trees that look so much like Douglas firs. But 'tis gone now."

"What did you see?"

"I haven't the faintest idea, Bill. But there certainly was something there, and it was moving. And, if I were imaginative, I would probably say that it was watching us, that, at the moment I arose and pointed, it glided back to the concealment of the trees."

"Well, *did* it?"

"It certainly seemed to do so, Bill."

I peered down there again, but I could not see anything moving. There was silence for some moments. The Dromans stood watching, waiting; stood expectant, puzzled.

"Oh, well," Rhodes said, turning a quizzical look in my direction and then to the face of Drorathusa, "we must expect to find live things in that forest."

I saw Drorathusa's eyes fixed upon his face, then, a few moments after he ceased speaking, return to the clump of cycads.

"Live things?" said I. "There may be things in this place of mystery more terrible than any live thing."

"Come, Bill, come. It can't be so bad as you imagine it, or our Dromans wouldn't be here.

"I wish," he added, "I knew what that thing is that I saw."

"Hello!" I cried the next moment, my look raised up to the vaulted roof. "What does *that* mean? Good Heaven, what next?"

The light, which was brightest up along the roof—in fact, it seemed *pressed* up against the rock-canopy like glow-

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And what were the thoughts of the queen as she saw before her two men from another world?

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ing, diaphanous mist—was changing, fading. The wonderful opalescence of it was disappearing before our eyes.

Of a sudden the spot where we stood was involved in a gloom indescribably strange. Up above, the light-mist was quivering and flickering, pale and dreadful.

"What in the world is it?" I cried.

"Queer place, this!" said Milton Rhodes.

"What can it mean?" I asked.

He did not answer. He sent a questioning look toward Drorathusa and her companions. Mine followed. The faces of the Dromans seemed to glimmer ghostlike in the thickening, awful darkness. Upon those pale features, however, was no discoverable sign of alarm, of uneasiness even.

The gloom deepened about us. Pitchy darkness came down with a rush. Far away, and up along the roof, there were pale flickerings and flashes. Then the light burst out, so sudden and so strong that pain shot through the eyes.

Came a cry, and I turned to see Drorathusa pointing, pointing down toward those cycads.

"There it is, Bill!" exclaimed Milton. "There it is again! See it moving?"

I saw it, but it was for a fleeting moment only. And, I thought, I saw something else.

"A little nearer this time," Rhodes told me. "There can be no doubt that it is watching us."

"Evidently," I said, "it is moving over to lie in wait for us. And, unless I'm very much deceived, it isn't alone."

"Hum," said Rhodes. "Queer place, Bill, to go into. Even our Hypogeans, it seems, don't know what to make of that apparition."

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They were conversing in low tones, casting searching, apprehensive looks along the ragged margin of the forest.

The gloom was falling again. Denser and denser it grew about us. Fainter, more and more dreadful became those distant flickerings and flashes along the great vaulted roof. Darkness, blackness was involving everything. Dimmer still became the flickerings. The stillness was utter, portentous. There was not the gentlest movement of air. The light gave a last faint, angry gleam and went out altogether.

Abruptly, from out of the darkness, a voice came sounding, and; though I knew that the voice was Drorathusa's, I started and almost gave a cry. I pressed the button, and the rays of the lamp flashed out, lighting up the spot and showing the tall figure of Drorathusa with arms extended upward in some mystic invocation. The others were kneeling, and the words that Drorathusa spoke were echoed, as it were, in their low responsive voices. It was a strange scene, truly — the dark, savage masses of rock, the tall Sibylline figure of the woman, the kneeling forms of the others and we two men from the sunlit world looking on in wonder and in awe.

Minutes passed. The wondrous, eerie voice of Drorathusa never ceased, though there were moments when those echoing voices were silent.

Look! Far away, there was a faint, ghostly flicker. Another and another. Brighter they became and brighter still, at last opalescent; soon rocks and forest, soon the whole weird landscape was again bathed in the mystic pearly light.

"What, in the name of wonder," I said, "was it?"

"An eclipse," smiled Rhodes. "Queer place, this."

"Queer place? Can't you hit another tune? You don't

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have to keep telling me that this is a queer place. I am not at all likely to forget that fact. And I wonder if these 'eclipses' are a frequent phenomenon. Certainly I hope that they are not."

"I wish that I could tell you, Bill, tell you that and a few other things."

"And," I added, "that forest, when the light goes, must be a queer place truly—gosh, I'm catching it from you! But I'll tell you what: I wouldn't like to find myself, in the depths of those woods, face to face with a *loopmuke* or a *gogrugron* or *something* and in that instant have the darkness come down."

"It would be rather unpleasant, I fancy. But unfortunately our likes or our dislikes are not likely to alter in any way the scheme of things."

The Dromans, all standing now, were singing a low and sweet song of thanksgiving and gladness. Yes, so sweet were the tones that they seemed to linger in the air, for some moments, even after the song had ceased.

We cast our looks along the margin of the forest, but not a single glimpse was caught of that mysterious object, or objects, that we had seen moving down there.

It was patent that the Dromans knew no more what to make of that apparition than we did ourselves and that they looked forward with no little apprehension to our entry into that wood.

The descent was resumed. Were eyes, somewhere below, watching our every movement? I feared that it was indeed so, and, as I well knew, every other member of our little

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band feared it, too. There was nothing, however, that we could do except descend and face the issue. To turn aside would be futile, for the watcher, or the watchers, would turn aside also to meet us.

Ere long we reached the talus, and our troubles were then over; that is, as regards the descent. But Heaven only knew what troubles were awaiting us somewhere in that forest, to which we were now drawing so very near.

As we made our way down over the rock-fragments, amidst which shrubs and stunted trees were growing, more than once did we pause and send keen, searching looks and glances into the silent recess of that mysterious wood.

Some of those sylvan depths were enshadowed, gloomy; others were pervaded with the strong, transparent light-mist, the objects involved in which *cast no shadows*.

At the foot of the talus, almost beneath the branches of great palm-trees, there was a pause.

"Now for it!" said Milton Rhodes solemnly.

The Dromans were clustered together in earnest but laconic dialogue, their eyes employed the while in a keen scrutiny of the forest aisles and recesses, before us and on either hand.

Insects were in the air about us; one or two shadowy butterflies flitted past; and that was all. Not a leaf stirred; the air was without the slightest movement. No song, no call of a bird broke the silence, which seemed to press down upon us and about us as though it were a tangible thing. It was as if the spot, the forest itself had never known either the voice or the movement of any sentient thing. But, somewhere in that forest, hidden and close

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at hand, there was something sentient—something, in all likelihood, watching us, watching and waiting. Waiting for what?

Or, came the sudden thought, even now stealing toward the place where we stood.

"This suspense," said I to myself, "is simply awful, is as terrible, even, as that which we knew when we were crossing the bridge, that chasm of unknown depth on either side."

Drorathusa turned to us and pointed in a rather vague direction out into the trees.

"Narranawnzee," she said.

"Evidently, said Milton, "they plan to strike that stream."

"I pray Heaven," I told him, "that we live to see that *narranawnzee.*"

Whereupon Rhodes laughed outright, and the effect of the sudden sound was curious and startling, so great was the tension of our nerves.

"One would think, Gloomy Face," said he, "that you had just issued from the Cave of Trophonius. 'And he never smiled again.' "

"I have an idea, grinning Shaky Knees," I retorted, "that we have got ourselves into a place more awful than any Cave of Trophonius. I don't blink, that's all."

"Nor, Bill, do I," said Milton soberly. "You know, I'd feel more at ease if it wasn't for the presence of the ladies. Why did they come on a journey so hazardous and so terrible?"

How often had we wondered that! We didn't know the ladies of Drome.

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We at once got in motion. Ondonarkus and Rhodes were leading, Drorathusa was just behind them, then came Nandradelphis and Silvisiris, whilst Zenvothunbro and myself brought up the rear. This disposition of our little party was as Drorathusa herself had desired it, and she had been at some pains to impress upon Rhodes and me (though there had been no necessity for that) the expediency of keeping our weapons ready for action at any instant.

On we went, deeper and deeper into the wood. Strange forms of vegetation, strange flowers, strange insects were everywhere. How interesting we should have found the place! But there was that *thing*, somewhere hidden, watching us perhaps—following.

Came a sharp exclamation, a dull sound from above; but it was only a bird, a thing of silver and gold, launching itself from off a branch of one of the trees which we were approaching. Away it went sailing, lovely as a vision from fairyland, and disappeared amongst the tree-trunks and foliage.

Five minutes or so passed. Another sound, an exclamation from Drorathusa, and the party came to a sudden halt.

Every one had heard it—a clear, unmistakable but inexplicable sound and from behind. We were being followed!

We stood listening for some moments, waiting; but the sound did not come again. Save for the low melancholy drone of insects, the spot was as silent as a tomb.

We resumed our advance, every sense on the alert. A few moments passed, and then we heard it again. This time it was off to the right, almost abreast of us, it seemed.

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Had it thus quickened its movements in order to get in front of us?

We waited, but nothing was seen, nothing was heard.

We had advanced but twenty or thirty feet when a sudden gloom involved the forest. The scene on the instant turned weird, unearthly. This, however, was but a few moments only; then came the light. The advance was at once resumed. But we had gone only a short distance when the gloom came once more, grew so dense that we had to come to a halt.

It lifted, just as I was on the point of switching on my electric light. Then like a bolt came utter darkness. And, even as the darkness fell, there was a velvety sound and a faint rustling from amongst the foliage beside us. With frantic haste I sought and pressed the light-switch. At the same instant Rhodes flashed on his light. A cry of horror broke from me. There, thrust over the top of a great log and but a few yards distant, was a long snaky head with a pair of great blazing eyes fixed upon me.

We were face to face at last!

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Chapter 34

ANOTHER!

I JERKED OUT MY REVOLVER, took swift aim, right between those great blazing eyes, and fired.

From the beast came a fearful roar, which seemed to end in a scream, and the long snaky head and neck (no more of the animal had been visible) disappeared.

"Good work, Bill!" applauded Milton Rhodes.

He had hardly spoken when the light came again, strong and beautiful. And the next instant came something else. A dark form, with a gleam of something white, rose into the air and drove straight toward us. I sprang aside and turned to fire, but I did not do so for fear of hitting the Dromans or Rhodes. There came a piercing shriek from Drorathusa, a sound made by cloth-rending talons. The monster had her.

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I leaped toward it and emptied the revolver into its side, whilst Ondonarkus and Zenvothunbro sent each an arrow into the body. That of the former was driven with such force that it passed clear through the body and went on for a distance of six or eight feet. And down the beast fell dead, though still quivering, there in our very midst.

I turned and hurried to Drorathusa. Rhodes was already beside her. As I reached her, the darkness came down again upon the place, pitchy and awful. The claws had ripped her dress, from the thigh down, literally into ribbons; strangely enough, the flesh had escaped even a scratch.

Drorathusa was badly shaken, and little wonder, forsooth. It had been a miraculous escape from terrible injury, from a most horrible death. A few moments, however, and she was as composed as though nothing had happened. Truly there was much to admire in this extraordinary woman.

Rhodes and I turned and examined the body, now lying quite still. It was that of a big cat. Strictly speaking, it was not, I suppose, a cat; it was not like anything that we had even seen or heard of. But a cat I shall call it, not knowing what other word to use. The head was long and of an aspect strikingly, repulsively snake-like. So was the neck. This reptilian resemblance was enchanced by the head's being absolutely destitute of hair, save for the vibrissae, which were really enormous. The body was dark, curiously mottled with gray. The breast and the belly were snowy white.

"Hum," said Milton Rhodes. "A strange and terrible creature, Bill. This wilderness must be a real one when we

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find a carnivore like this subsisting in it. And Goodness only knows of what other beasts it is the habitat."

"Yes. And, with such creatures in the woods, our journey through them is likely to prove an interesting one."

"Most interesting. O well," said Rhodes, "we have our revolvers, and the Dromans have their bows and arrows, to say nothing of their swords. And they know how to use them, too."

"And that reminds me," I told him: "I haven't reloaded my blunderbuss."

"Save those shells, Bill."

"What for?"

"So we can reload them."

"Reload them? Do you think we'll be able to do that in this world called Drome."

"Why not?"

"But how—?"

Rhodes turned like a flash.

"Hear that?" he said. "By the great Nimrod, another one!"

The darkness still lay impenetrable, pitchy. We flashed our lights into the trees, this way and that, all about us; but no eyes were seen gleaming at us, nothing was seen moving save the shadows, and not the faintest sound was heard.

The Dromans were listening intently, but it was patent that they had not heard that sound which had whirled Rhodes about; nor had I heard it myself.

"Are you sure," I queried, "that there was a sound?"

"I most certainly thought that I heard something."

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"Look!" I cried, pointing upward.

Through openings in the foliage, were to be seen pale flickerings of light.

"Thank Goodness," Rhodes said, "we'll soon again have light. I hope that this time it will last."

And we soon did—the strong mystic, and yet strangely misty, light pervading the mysterious and dreadful wood, the flickerings and flashes overhead soon opalescent and as beautiful as ever.

We at once (Ondonarkus having picked up his arrow and Zenvothunbro drawn his from the body of the cat) left that spot, to make our way deeper and deeper into that forest, which harbored enemies so terrible and so treacherous.

"Why," I queried, "didn't we camp up there on the the rocks, where it would have been impossible (save in one of these periods of darkness) for anything to approach us unseen? We had made a day's good journey; and here we have gone and left a place of safety to camp somewhere in this horrible wood."

"What," returned Milton Rhodes, "would that have been but postponing the inevitable? For into these trees we should have had to go, sooner or later, and the thing would have been watching for us just the same. As you say, we had made a good journey for the day; well, aren't we making it better?"

"It isn't ended yet."

"This place, after all, Bill, may not be so bad as it seems."

"Well, there is one consolation," I remarked: "there is

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no danger of our starving to death in this lovely Dante's Inferno. Look at all the fruit and nuts and things."

"Yes. From that point of view, the place is a veritable Garden of the Hesperides."

At length we reached the stream, considerably larger than I had expected to find it. At this point where we struck it, the water was deep, the current a gentle one. The rich forest growth hung out over the surface for some distance. There was a soft rustling of leaves, for some of the branches dipped into the water and were swaying to and fro. This and the faint, melancholy whisper of the gliding element were all that broke the heavy, deathlike stillness. It was a placid, a lovely scene.

The attainment of this their objective seemed to give our Dromans much pleasure; but, save for the fact that there was now no danger of our perishing of thirst, I could not see that we were any better off than we had been.

I thought that this would be the end of our march, now a long one indeed. But the Dromans merely paused, then started down the stream; and, of course, along with them went Rhodes and myself.

At times we had literally to force our way through the dense and tangled undergrowth; then we would be moving through lovely aisles—

"And many a walk traversed
Of stateliest covert, cedar, pine, or palm."

We pushed on for perhaps two miles, never moving far from the stream, and then made camp in a beautiful open spot, over which, however, the great branches formed an unbroken canopy of leaves.

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A guard was arranged for the night. Rhodes had the first watch.

It was during my vigil that it came—a sudden, fierce, frightful scream, which awoke every member of our little party. It came from somewhere down the river, and it was replete with terror and agony; it was a sound that made the very air quiver and throb. It seemed human, and yet I told myself that it simply could not be. And then it ceased, as suddenly as it had come, and all was still again, save for the gentle, sad whispering of the water.

"What," I exclaimed, my voice, however, low and guarded, "could it have been? It sounded human, but I know that that sound did not come from the throat of a man or a woman."

"I think you are right, Bill," said Milton Rhodes. "What it was — well, that seems to be a mystery to the Dromans themselves."

I turned and saw Drorathusa, who had just issued from the tent, standing beside Ondonarkus and engaged in hurried and whispered dialogue, the troubled looks which she incessantly directed into the forest, in that quarter whence had come that scream, advertising dread and something for which I can not find a name.

"Evidently," Rhodes observed, "they know but little more about this place and the things in it than we do ourselves.

"And that is virtually nothing."

"Did you," he asked abruptly, "hear something else?"

"Something else? When?"

"Something besides that scream. And while it was filling the air. And just afterwards."

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"I heard nothing else. Did you?"

"I believe that I did."

"What?"

"I can't say," was his answer. "I wish that I could."

"Well," I said, "all we know is that there is something sneaking or prowling about in this wood, that it has just got a victim and that, in all probability, it means to get one of us—maybe all of us."

Rhodes nodded, rather rueful of visage.

"We were fortunate enough," he added "to kill two carnivores—snake-cats; I wonder if we shall be as fortunate the next time. For there is another thing waiting, sneaking, watching, biding its time."

"Another, yes," said I. "But another *what?*"

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Chapter 35

A SCREAM AND—SILENCE

I AM AFRAID THAT NO ONE SLEPT very well after that.

It was about seven o'clock when we left that place. And I confess that I was more uneasy, more troubled than I would have cared to acknowledge. For we were headed toward the spot—at any rate, in the direction—whence had come that scream. What would we find there? Would we find anything?

We did.

We had gone about an eighth of a mile. The disposition of our little party was as it had been the day before; Rhodes and Ondonarkus, that is, were in the lead, followed by Drorathusa, then came Nandradelphis and Silvisiris, whilst Zenvothunbro and myself formed the rear-guard. Had my own wishes in the matter been followed, Rhodes and I would

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have been together. The formation assumed was, as I believe I have mentioned, the one that Drorathusa herself desired. The idea, of course, was to have the front and rear protected each by one of the mysterious weapons of the mysterious stranger-men, which weapons, undoubtedly, were far more formidable in the imagination of Drorathusa and her companions than they were in reality.

Certainly our revolvers were in every way excellent weapons, but I could not help wishing that they had a heavier bullet.

As has been said, we had proceeded about a furlong. The dense and tangled undergrowth had forced us away from the stream, to a distance of perhaps three hundred feet.

At the moment a sound had fetched me up and my exclamation had brought the party to a sudden halt.

"What is it, Bill?" Rhodes asked.

"We are being *followed!*"

He made no immediate response to that dire intelligence. We all stood listening, waiting; but a silence pervaded the forest as deep as though it had never, since the day of creation, been broken by the faintest pulsation of sound.

Then, after some moments, Rhodes asked:

"Are you sure, Bill, that we are being followed?"

"Yes! I tell you that I know that we are!'

"Well," said he, turning slowly, "I don't see that we can do anything about it, save keep a sharp lookout; and so on we go."

Whereupon he and the others started. I had turned to follow when that sound, low and mysterious as before,

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stopped me in my tracks. And in that very instant came another—a sharp interjection from Rhodes, instantaneously followed by a scream, the short, piercing scream of a woman.

I should have explained that we were in a dense growth of fern, a growth some ten or twelve feet in height; it was a meet place indeed for an ambuscade. Overhead, too, the branches met and intertangled, affording an excellent place for a snake-cat or some other arboreal monster to lie in wait and drop or spring upon any human or brute passing below.

Now, as I whirled to that exclamation and scream—the danger there behind forgotten in what was so imminent before—it was to find, to my indescribable fear and horror, that my companions, every single one of them, had vanished.

And that which chilled my heart was enhanced by the fact that before me, where Rhodes and the Dromans *must* be; there was no agitation amongst the ferns, not the slightest movement amongst them. I was alone, alone in that place of dense, concealing vegetation, of silence and mystery. But no; they were there, my companions, right there before me. The ferns hid them, that was all. But why were they so still? Why utterly silent? What had happened? That exclamation, that scream, the silence that had followed—what did it mean?

It has taken some space to set this down, but it must not be imagined that the space itself during which I stood there was a long one. It was, in fact, very brief; it was no more, I suppose, than fifteen or twenty seconds. Then I was moving forward through the crushed ferns, as swiftly

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as was consistent with caution, and, of course, with the revolver gripped ready for instant action.

I had covered perhaps three yards, had reached the point where the way crushed through the fern-growth turned sharp to the left to pass between two great tree-trunks; then it was that I heard it—a low, rustling sound and close at hand.

Something was moving there; it was moving toward me.

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Chapter 36

GORGONIC HORROR

ALMOST THAT VERY INSTANT I heard it, that low, rustling sound made by something moving through (as I thought) the fern-growth ceased. My companions! What had happened to them?

I began moving forward, every second that passed enhancing that fear which chilled my heart. For each step took me nearer to, though not directly toward, that spot from which had come that mysterious sound.

Just as I was passing between those great tree-trunks, came a sound that fetched me up in my tracks, came a sudden low voice:

"Oh, Bill!"

I gave a smothered exclamation and dashed forward. Rhodes was safe; at any rate, he was alive. A second or two, and I burst from the fern-growth.

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Surprise, amazement brought me up instanter, and the next instant an indescribable horror had me in its grip.

The surprise, the amazement will be explained when I say that there before me stood my companions, every one of them, safe and sound. There they stood, motionless and silent as so many statues, gazing, as though held in a baleful charm, upon that thing before them. Rhodes was the only one that moved as I burst out into the scene.

"I wondered, Bill, why you didn't come. I was just about to call out to you again."

"And I wondered why you all were so silent, after that exclamation and that scream. I understand it now."

Shuddering, I pointed with my alpenstock at that thing before us.

"In the name of the Gorgons, what is that?"

"I wish that I knew, Bill. What is your name for such a monstrosity as that?"

A silence of some seconds followed, and then I remembered something, that rustling sound.

I turned, and another shudder went through me. Drorathusa was standing very near that spot from which that rustling sound must have come.

"What is in there?" I asked, pointing.

Milton Rhodes whirled to the direction that I indicated.

"In where?"

"In those ferns, behind Drorathusa. I heard something in there, something that was moving."

"When?"

"Some few moments ago, just before you called to me."

A wan smile flitted across the face of Milton Rhodes.

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"That was Drorathusa herself moving through that thick tangle of flowers."

"But I tell you, Milton, that it was moving *towards me!*"

"It was Drorathusa," said Rhodes. "You only thought that the sound was moving toward you, away from us. No, Bill; it was Drorathusa. There was no other sound. To that I can swear."

So my imagination had tricked me. And yet how could I be sure that it had? For, in such a moment, with such a sight before him, Rhodes himself might have been the one deceived. In that case, any instant might see Death come leaping into our very midst.

"Who gave that scream?" I asked.

"One of the girls, when we broke out of the ferns and she saw *that*. Nandradelphis, I believe."

This turned me again to that monster and its victim. No wonder that that piercing scream had broken from the girl!

The spot into which we had stepped was, for a distance of perhaps one hundred and fifty feet, almost free from undergrowth. Tall trees, looking very much at a first glance like Douglas firs, rose up all around, but there were other growths; there were twisted trunks and branches that had a gnarled and savage aspect; the light was pearly, misty; all made a fitting setting truly for that which we saw there in the midst of it.

For, sixty feet or so distant, still, white and lifeless, naked save for a skin (spotted something like a leopard's) about the waist, the toes two or three feet from the ground, hung the body of a man.

That itself was shocking enough, but what we saw up

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above—how I shudder, even at this late date, as that picture rises before me! It was a nightmare-shape, of mottled green and brown, with splotches of something whitish, bluish.

There were splotches, too upon some of the leaves and upon the ground beneath. It was like blood, that whitish, bluish stuff, and, indeed, that is what it was. In the midst of that shape, were two great eyes, but they never moved, were fixed and glassy. One of the higher branches had been broken, though not clean through, and, wound around this branch, the end of which had fallen upon that on which the monster rested, were what I at first took to be enormous serpents. They were, in fact, tentacula. There was a third tentacle; it hung straight down. And it was from this, a coil around the neck and two around the left arm, that the body of the unfortunate man hung, white and lifeless, like a victim of the hangman's noose.

"A tree-octopus!" I cried.

"I suppose most people would call it that. It has but three tentacles, however, and so is a tripus. And that scream we heard last night—well, we know now, Bill, what it was."

I shivered.

"No wonder," I said, "that we thought that the sound was unhuman! In the grip of that thing, the tentacle around his neck! So near, and we never stirred to his help!"

"Because we never dreamed. And, had we known, Bill, we could not have saved him. Life would have been extinct, crushed out of him, before ever we could have got here and cut him down."

"I thought of some dreadful things," I said, "but never of a monster like that."

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"A queer place, this forest, a horrible place, Bill," Milton Rhodes said, glancing a little nervously about him. "But come."

He started forward. The Dromans hung back, but I moved along after him, whereupon the others followed, though with great apparent reluctance.

"What I don't quite understand, Bill, is this: what happened?"

"Why, the poor fellow was passing beneath the branches, the octopus thrust down its tentacle, wound it around the victim's neck and started to pull him up."

"All that is very clear. But then just what happened to the octopus?"

"The limb to which the monster had attached itself—see where the limb has been struck, perhaps by a falling tree, and weakened—well, it broke, and down the monster came crashing onto that branch on which we see it."

"That too is quite clear," said Rhodes. "But what killed the thing? The fall, it seems to me, could not have done it."

The next moment we halted, a little distance from the spot where hung the still, white body of the Droman.

"Oh, I see it now," said Rhodes, pointing. "Why didn't I see that before? As the monster came down, it was impaled upon those sword-like stubs of branches, one going through the body, the other out through the face. Face! The thing seems to be all face. And the human aspect of that visage! How like the big face of a fat man!"

That, there could be no doubt, was what had happened. And that Gorgonic horror, in the shock of the fall and its impalement, even in its death-throes, had never loosed the grip on its victim.

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"We can't leave the poor devil hanging like that," I said.

"Of course not. And to give him burial will mean the loss of time probably more precious even than we think it. This is a wood horrible as any that Dante ever found himself in."

"We must risk it. We can't leave him like that or the body lying on the ground for the beasts to devour."

Rhodes and I still had our ice-picks, and we at once divested ourselves of the packs and started the grave. And, as we worked, try as I would I could not shake off from me — the feeling that, concealed somewhere in the trees, something was lurking, was watching us.

Zenvothunbro cut down the victim. Along the tentacle, ran two rows of suckers, like those of a devil-fish. So powerful was the grip, we could not remove the thing; and so we buried the poor Droman, in his shallow grave, with those coils still gripping him.

Forthwith we quitted that cursed spot, though Milton, I believe, wanted to climb up and subject that monster to a scientific scrutiny!

And, as we pushed on through that dreadful wood, it was as though some sixth sense bore to my brain a warning,— vague but persistent, sinister:

"It is following!"

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Chapter 37

AS WE WERE PASSING UNDERNEATH

SOMETHING WAS FOLLOWING US. And we were not dependent solely upon that mysterious sixth sense of mine for knowledge of that sinister fact, either. Sounds were heard. Sometimes it would be a low rustling, as though made by some body gliding through the foliage. Sometimes it would be the snapping of a twig, behind us, off to the right, perhaps, or to the left; never in front of us. Alas, it grieves me to do so, but I am constrained by the love of truth, and by nothing else, to inform the admirers of that great scientist Mark Twain that twigs *do* snap when they are stepped upon. Yes, I wish that we could have had some of those obstreperous applauders of Mark's absurd essay on Fenimore Cooper with us there in that Droman wood! There were other sounds, too, one of them a thing that I could never describe—a faint humming,

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throbbing sound that seemed to chill the blood in our veins, so weird and frightful a thing that neither Milton Rhodes nor I could even dream of an explanation. And it was in vain that we looked to our Dromans for one. They tried to explain, but their explanation was as mysterious as the fact itself.

Onward we pressed through that terrible place, that abode of snake-cats, tree-octopi and unknown monsters.

At last, and for the first time since we had entered the forest, a current of air touched our cheeks, stirred the foliage and the lovely tresses of the ladies. Soon the breeze, soft and gentle, was whispering and sighing among the tree-tops. A gloom pervaded the place; the wood became dark and awful, though through it the light-mist was still drifting, drifting in streams that swayed and shook and quivered. Rhodes and I thought that we were going to have another eclipse. But we were wrong. It began to rain, if I may so call that misty drizzle that came drifting down and, indeed, at times seemed to form in the air before our eyes.

I thought that this would stop us, for soon everything was wet and dripping—dripping, dripping. But the Dromans pressed on steadily, grimly. Soon every one of us was wet to the skin.

An hour or so passed, and then the drizzle ceased and the gloom lifted.

Rhodes and I were discussing this strange phenomenon when abruptly he cried out and pointed.

"There!" said he, reaching for his revolver. "At last we have ocular proof that we are being followed!"

Even as he spoke, that faint humming, throbbing sound again filled the air,

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"Look there! See it, Bill?"

"I see it."

What I saw was an agitation, slight but unmistakable, in the thicket from which we had emerged but a few moments before.

Something was moving there, something was gliding through the dense undergrowth.

I jerked out my revolver. Rhodes had already drawn his.

"Might as well try a shot," said he, "for it won't show itself, in all likelihood, while we are standing ready to receive it."

We fired almost simultaneously. There was a smothered crash in the thicket, as though some heavy body had given a powerful lurch sideways. The throbbing of that mysterious sound grew faster, louder; the agitated foliage began to shake and quiver violently; and then of a sudden sound and agitation were stilled.

"We got it, Bill!" cried Milton, starting towards the spot.

"For Heaven's sake," I called after him, "don't go over there! Let's get out of this. It may not be dead, and—and we have no idea what in the world the thing is."

"We'll find that out."

I suppose that I should have been going along after him the next moment, but Drorathusa sprang forward with a cry of horror, began tugging at his sleeve and begging him to come back. So earnest was her manner, so great the fear shown by this woman usually so self-contained and emotionless, Rhodes gave in, though with great apparent reluctance.

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A few moments, and we were moving away from the spot.

This Rhodes has always regretted, for to this day we do not know for certain what that thing was which followed us for so long. I have regretted it more than once myself; but I confess that I had no regrets at the time.

I say we do not know for certain: we do know what Drorathusa and the others thought that it was; but that is a creature so grisly that it must (at any rate, such is the belief of Rhodes and myself) be placed amongst Chimeras, Hydras and such fabled monsters.

At length, after a long and fatiguing march, we reached the spot where the water goes plunging over a tremendous precipice. The falls are perpendicular, their height at least half a thousand feet. It was necessary to move off to the right for a considerable distance to find a way of descent. The bottom reached, we headed for the stream. There we found the boat which the Dromans had left in their outward journey, and beside it was a second and smaller one.

This strange craft was something of a mystery to our Hypogeans; but Drorathusa found a message, traced on the inner surface of a piece of bark, and that seemed to clarify the matter somewhat. Drorathusa held up three fingers; three men had come in that boat. And one of them, she told us, must have been the man whose body we had found hanging in the tentacle of the octopus. What had become of the victim's companions? Why had the trio come into a place so dreadful? Well, why had we?

Our journey for this day was already a long one, but we did not halt in that spot. We got into the boat and went

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floating down the stream, to get away from the thunder of the falling waters.

As the current caught the craft, Rhodes turned to me, and, a smile in his eyes, he said, quoting from *The Faerie Queene:*

" 'Have care, I pray, to guide the cock-bote well,
Least worse on sea then us on land befell.' "

Drorathusa, who had learned a few words of our language, was watching him, and, after a moment's silence, she waved a hand in the downstream direction and said:

"*Narranawnzee*—fine and dandy."

One thing, by the way, that from the very beginning had intrigued Rhodes and me not a little was the relationship existing amongst our Dromans. It had at first been my belief (though never that of Rhodes) that Drorathusa was the wife of Ondonarkus. Ere long, however, it had become clear to me that wife she was not. But what was she? His daughter, Rhodes had said. And daughter I had at length decided, and still believed, that she was. In short, we put the relationship as follows, and I may as well say at once that the future was to place its O.K. upon this bit of Sherlock-Holmesing of ours: Ondonarkus was the father of all our Dromans except one, Silvisiris, and to her he was father-in-law.

This little mystery cleared up—at any rate, to our satisfaction — we tackled another, which was this: what *was* Drorathusa. I think it has been made sufficiently obvious that she was no ordinary woman. But what was she? The only answer that Rhodes and I had been able to find was that Drorathusa was indeed a Sibyl, a priestess or some-

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thing of the kind. And again I may as well say at once that we were right.

But why had they set out on a journey so strange and so hazardous—through the land of the tree-octopi and the snake-cats, through that horrible, unearthly fungoid forest, and up and up, up into the caves of utter blackness, across that frightful chasm, up to the Tamahnowis Rocks, into the blaze of the sunshine, out onto the snow and ice on Mount Rainier?

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It was as though we suddenly had entered a fairyland, so wonderful was this gliding along on the placid bosom of the river when contrasted with the fatigues, the dangers and the horrors through which we had passed. There was nothing to do but steer the boat, keep her out in the stream; and so hours, the whole day long was passed in the langourous luxury of resting, in watching the strange trees glide past and in making such progress as we were able in acquiring a knowledge of the Droman language. We found the ladies much better teachers than Zenvothunbro and Ondonarkus. In fact, there was simply no comparison. Why they should have proved so immeasurably superior in this respect to the representatives of the brainy sex, I do not presume to try to explain. I merely record a fact; its explanation I leave to those who know more about science than I do.

For three days we glided through that lovely land, whose loveliness was a mask, so to speak, and but made the place the more terrible, for it was a habitat of creatures very strange indeed.

Late in the afternoon of this third day—how strange

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these words seem! But what others can I use? Late in the afternoon of this third day, we entered a swamp. The current became sluggish, our drift even more so, and right glad were we to put the oars—of which, though, there were only two pairs—in motion and send her along, for that was not a place in which any sane man would want to linger. Besides the oars, however, there were several paddles, and we sent the boat at a good clip through the dark and sullen waters.

Weird masses of moss and weirder filaments hung from the great branches, which at times met over the stream.

We were passing underneath one of these gnarled and bearded arches when there came a piercing shriek from Nandradelphis, accompanied rather than followed by a cry from Drorathusa of

"Loopmuke!"

I dropped the oar and reached for my revolver, turned and saw Ondonarkus, standing in the bow, whip out his sword and slash savagely at the winged monster as it came driving down upon him.

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Chapter 38

SOMETHING BESIDES MADNESS

THERE WAS A SHOCK, THE BOAT, I thought, was surely going over. Came a heavy plunge, and she righted, though sluggishly, for water had come pouring over the side in gallons. Ondonarkus had vanished. The demon was struggling madly on the surface, one of its great wings almost shorn clean from the body. An instant, and the head of Ondonarkus was seen emerging. Almost at that very second, Milton Rhodes fired at the ape-bat; a convulsive shudder passed through the hideous body, which slowly sank and disappeared.

Ondonarkus showed the most admirable coolness. He did not dash at the side of the boat, as nine men out of ten would have done, but swam quietly to the stern, where he was drawn inboard without shipping a spoonful of water, unhurt but minus his sword.

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Two hours afterwards, we reached firm ground, which soon became high and rocky. The vegetation there was sparse and dwarfish, and the place had a look indescribably wild and forbidding. Then at last we came to the end of the cavern itself. Yes, there before us, beetling up for hundreds of feet, up to the very roof, rose the rocky wall —into a cleft in which the river slowly and silently went gliding, like some monstrous serpent.

We passed the night in that spot and in the morning entered the cleft, which, in my troubled imagination, seemed to open wider to receive us.

Oh, what a strange and dreadful place was that in which we now found ourselves! One thought of lost souls and of nameless things. Ere long there was no perceptible current, and so out came the oars again. The place was a perfect labyrinth—a place of gloom and at times of absolute darkness. We were no less than three whole days in that awful maze of rock and water; but, hurrah, it was to emerge into a landscape beautiful beyond all description.

The region was a wilderness, but soon—the day after that in which we issued from the labyrinth, in fact—we sighted our first habitation of man in this world of Drome. The next day we reached a village, where we passed the night. We were much struck by that deep respect with which Drorathusa was received. As for our own reception—well, that really gave us something to think about.

Not that there was any sign of menace. There was nothing like that. It was the looks, the very mien of those Hypogeans that, to say the least, puzzled and worried Rhodes and myself. That Drorathusa endeavored to allay the sus-

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picion or dread (or whatever it was) in the minds of the people was as clear to us as if we had understood every word spoken. The manner, however, in which they received her address but enhanced our uneasiness. No voice was raised in dissent to what she said; but there was no blinking the fact that there was no acquiescence whatever in what she urged so earnestly.

"What in the world, Milton," I asked, "does it mean?"

"Ask me something that I can tell you, Bill," was Rhodes' consoling answer. "You know, when we came in sight of that first Droman habitation, I thought that now our troubles were just about over."

"So did I."

"But we see now that we were wrong, Bill, that we were wrong. It is a queer business, and Goodness only knows what it means."

"It means trouble," I told him.

And the very next day showed that I was right.

We embarked at an early hour the following morning and in another and larger boat. It had a high ornamented prow and was indeed a lovely little craft. This day's voyage brought us to the City of Lellolando. It has a population of about fifteen thousand, and there Rhodes and I had our first sight of the beautiful Droman architecture, as displayed, that is, in the public buildings, for the dwellings are in no wise remarkable. These public buildings are not many, of course, in a place so small, but their beauty was indeed a surprise and a pleasure.

Incomparably the most wonderful is the temple, built upon the summit of a great rounded rock in almost the

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very center of the city. It was as though we had been transported back to "the glory that was Greece." Yes, it is my belief, and the belief of Milton Rhodes also, that this temple would not have suffered could it by some miracle have been placed beside the celebrated temple of Artemis at Ephesus Buildings more wonderful than this we were to see, the grandest of all the great temple in Nornawnla Prendella, the Golden City, which is the capital of Drome; but I do not think that anything we saw afterwards struck us with greater wonder and amazement.

"Some Chersiphron," said Rhodes, "must have wandered from Drome and finally made his way up into ancient Greece and taught the secrets of his art there. It is indeed a marvel that the art of the ancient Hellenes and this of Drome are so very similar. And yet they must have been autochthonous.

"But," he added, "I wonder what they worship in that splendid place. Some horribile pantheon, perhaps."

"Let us," said I, "give them the benefit of the doubt. For all that we know to the contrary, these Dromans may be true monotheists."

And this, I rejoice to say, the Dromans are, though, I regret to subjoin, there are some very absurd things in their religion, things dark and even things very terrible.

But I anticipate in this, for it was just after we landed that it happened.

We had started up one of the principal streets, on our way to the house of a high functionary, though, of course, Rhodes and I had no idea whither we were bound. On either side the street, was a solid mass of humanity—many of the young people, by the way, having hair as white as snow,

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like that of our Nandradelphis. Of a sudden a man, lean of visage and with eyes that glowed like red coals, broke through the guards (a half dozen or so were marching along on either side of our little procession) and slashed savagely at the face of Rhodes with a great curved dagger. My companion sprang aside, almost thrusting me onto my knees, and the next instant he dealt the man a blow with his alpenstock. The blow, however, was a slanting one, ineffectual. With a scream, the fellow sprang again, his terrible knife upraised; but the guards threw themselves upon him, and he was dragged off, struggling and screaming like a maniac.

Of a truth, Rhodes had had a very narrow escape.

And what did it mean?

"It might," I said, "have been the act of a madman."

"It might have been," was Milton's answer. "But, unless I am greatly mistaken, there was something besides madness back of it."

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Chapter 39

THE GOLDEN CITY

OUR STAY IN THAT PLACE WAS marred by no other untoward incident; but right glad was I when, on the following morning, we were in our boat and going down the stream once more.

"We ought to be safe out here," I remarked at last.

"I don't know about that, Bill," smiled Milton. "The stream is not a wide one certainly, and those bushes and tress that line the bank offer—there, look at that!"

But a hundred feet or so before us, a boat was gliding out from the concealment of a mass of foliage. There were three men in it, and the looks which they fixed upon us were lowering and sinister.

"Look at that fellow!" said Milton Rhodes, drawing his revolver. "If that isn't the chap who broke through with the amicable intention of carving me, all I have to say is that he is his twin brother."

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This man was thin almost to emaciation, but his companions were burly fellows, every lineament of them bespeaking the ruffian.

They held their craft stationary or nearly so. In a few moments, therefore, we were drawing near to them. Drorathusa had arisen, and she spoke to the occupants of the strange boat in a rather sharp, imperious manner. Her presence or her words seemed to awe them; and I was thanking our lucky stars that, after all, there was not going to be any trouble, when of a sudden, just as the drift of our boat brought Rhodes and me alongside, their bridled passions burst forth in a storm of snarls, cries and fierce gestures of menace. There was a moment when I thought that they were actually going to attempt to board us. But they then drew off a few yards, though there was no diminution in that storm of abuse, execrations and threats that was hurled upon us. All three were armed, but no motion towards their weapons was made. The reason for that, I suppose was the sight of Ondonarkus and Zenvothunbro standing there each with an arrow to the string. Certainly the fellows did not in any way fear *our* weapons.

Some minutes passed, during which the two boats continued to drift almost side by side and that hideous clamor filled the air. At last, in an attempt to put an end to it, Milton Rhodes raised his revolver and took careful aim. Drorathusa gave a cry and then addressed some rather fierce words to the trio. In all likelihood, she did not know what Rhodes was going to do. He fired. As he was standing and as but a little distance separated the boats, the bullet, which struck just above the waterline, went out through the bottom.

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The change was magical. You should have seen those fellows! Whether it was the report of the weapon or whether it was the hole through which the water came spouting in, I do not know; but the taming of those wild men was swift and complete. As soon as they had recovered their wits, round flew the bow of their boat and away they went towards the shore. Our Dromans burst into laughter, even Drorathusa. And that was the last that we saw of those three fanatics.

But why had they done it? Wherefore were Milton Rhodes and I the objects of a hatred so fierce and so insensate?

Nor were we permitted to forget that fact. Intelligence of our arrival had spread almost as quickly as though it had been broadcasted by radio, and along the banks the people were waiting, in twos and threes, in scores and in hundreds, to see the men from the mysterious and fearful World Above—harbingers, in their minds, of calamities and nameless things. Goodness only knows how many fists were shaken at Rhodes and me during the day, how many were the maledictions that they hurled upon us. Happily, however, there was no act of hostility.

"You know, Bill," Milton smiled, "I am beginning to wish that we were back there among those *gogrugrons,* whatever they are, and the tree-octopuses."

This day's voyage brought us to the City of Dranondocrad. There a change was made that certainly did not displease me—from our little craft to none other than one of the queen's own, a long beautiful vessel with oarsmen and guards.

The next day we passed a large tributary flowing in from our left, from out a yawning cavern there. This was by

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no means, however, the first cave we had seen entering the main one. As one moves through some valley in the mountains, smaller ones are seen coming in on either hand; and so it was in this great cavern of Drome, save that the valleys were caves. In that place, the great cavern itself has a width of two miles or more, and it is four or five thousand feet up to the vaulted roof.

"One wonders," said I, "why the roof doesn't cave in."

"Pooh, Bill!" said Rhodes. "One doesn't marvel that natural bridges don't collapse or that the roof of the Mammoth Cave doesn't come crashing down."

The two days succeeding this brought us into the very heart of Drome, and on the third we reached the Golden City itself.

This, the capital of the Droman nation, is situated at the lower end of a lake, a most picturesque sheet of water some fifteen miles in length. Where the river flows into it and for a distance of about a league down, the lake extends from one wall of the great cavern clean to the other. The walls go straight down into the water to what depth no man knows.

It was about midafternoon when our boat, followed by a fleet of smaller craft, glided out onto this lovely expanse of water. At a point about halfway down the lake, we had our first view of Narnawnla Prendella, the Golden City. I say view, but it was in reality but little more than a glimpse that we obtained. For, almost at that very moment, a dense gloom fell upon water and landscape. Fierce and dreadful were the flickerings along the roof a mile or more above us. So sudden and awful was the change that even

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the Dromans seemed astonished. There was a blinding flash overhead, and then utter blackness everywhere.

Rhodes and I flashed on our lights. For a time the Dromans waited, as though expecting the light to come at any moment; but it did not come. Along the shore on either side and in the distant city, lights were gleaming out. A sudden voice came, mystic and wonderful; Rhodes and I turned, and there was Drorathusa standing with arms extended upward in invocation, as we had seen her in that first eclipse. Minutes passed. But the light did not come. At last the oars were put in motion again. Dark and agitated, however, were the looks of the Dromans, and more than one pair of eyes fixed themselves on Rhodes and me in a manner that plainly marked us as objects of some superstitious dread—if, indeed, it was not something worse.

Steadily, however, our boat glided forward through the black and awful night.

"What is that?" I at length asked as suddenly there before us some vapor or an obscuring something thinnned out or rose from the surface of the water. "It looks like a floating-palace, with a lot of dwarfish buldings floating behind it. That isn't part of the city itself."

"No; but a palace in all probability," Rhodes answered. "Certainly a very large and imposing structure. That must be an island."

And an island it is.

At this moment Drorathusa moved to our side, and, indicating the great building in question, many windows of which were a perfect blaze of light, she said:

"Lathendra Lepraylya."

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Her eyes lingered on Rhodes' face, and her look, I saw, was somber and troubled.

So that was the queen's palace.

Soon we would be in the presence of this Lathendra (Queen) Lepraylya.

What manner of woman was this sovereign of the Dromans?

What awaited us there?

I remembered that look of Drorathusa's, and I confess that my thoughts were soon troubled and somber.

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Chapter 40

BEFORE LEPRAYLYA

ONE BY ONE, IN TWOS AND THREES and then in a body, the small craft had dropped behind, and now we were alone on the black waters, across which, from the shores and from many of the boats, came quivering lines of light.

"It must be the eclipse," said Rhodes, "that has affected the Dromans in this manner so remarkable. It is plain, Bill, that there is something about this sudden darkness that is mysterious and awful to these Hypogeans. It must be that it is in some way a most extraordinary eclipse."

It *was* a most extraordinary eclipse, and there *was* something awful about it — something more awful than we thought. And what troubled me the most was this: they seemed to think that we men from the World Above had something to do with this dread darkness—already one of far longer duration than any eclipse any living Droman had ever known. Indeed, none such had been recorded for what we would call centuries, and the last had been the harbinger of the most fearful calamities.

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We knew full well that some superstition was pointing a fell finger in our direction; but through the mind of neither flickered the thought that this eclipse might so to speak, be metamorphosed into a death-charge against us.

As we were drawing in to the palace, a heavy voice came across the water. On the instant the rowers rested on their oars. Our commander answered the hail, the heavy voice came again, whereupon the oars were dipped and our craft glided in toward the landing-place.

This hailing, by the way, was pure formality, for they on the island knew who we were.

"What a scene!" said Milton Rhodes, his eyes shining. "What a moment, old *tillicum,* is this for you and me! We shall never, in all likelihood, know another such as this is!"

Like a great lovely water-bird, our boat swung in to the landing-place, where she was at once made fast.

And then it was that another strange thing happened.

Rhodes and I stepped from the boat together. Since the light had gone out in that fierce and terrible flash, not the faintest glimmer had shone overhead, anywhere. But hardly had *we* set foot on the island when there came a flash wrathful and awful.

For a few moments, for the flash seemed to travel along the roof for many miles, the palace and the other buildings there, the people, and there were two or three hundreds, the water, the city, the distant walls of rock stood out in bold relief, as though in the glare of leperous fire. Then utter darkness again. It was like, and yet, strangely enough, very unlike too, a lightning-flash; but no thunder roared, not the faintest sound was heard.

Again shot and quivered that leperous light.

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And this time cries broke out, cries that fear and horror wrung from the Dromans.

It was, indeed, an awful moment and an awful scene.

"It looks," said Milton, "as though they think that the world is coming to an end."

"Certainly," I nooded, looking about me a little anxiously, "it seems that they think just that. Look at Drorathusa!"

Again she was standing with arms extended upward, as we had seen her at the mouth of the great cave, and once more that strange, eerie voice of hers came sounding. Every one else there, save Rhodes and myself and a little girl who was clinging to Drorathusa's dress, was kneeling. Little wonder that, as I looked upon that scene, with the leperous light flashing and shaking and quivering through the darkness, I thought, for some moments, it must all be a dream.

The flashes became more frequent. The light began to turn opalescent and to shoot and quiver and shake up along the roof.

Then of a sudden the eclipse—what other word is there to use?—had passed and all was bright once more.

For some moments, there was silence, utter, resting on the place like something tangible. Arose a murmur of gladness, and then a song, started by Drorathusa herself, of thanksgiving. Every one, I believe, joined in this anthem, or whatever it should be called, and the voices, rising and falling, produced upon us twain from another world, though we understood but a single word, an effect strange and pronounced.

That single word which we understood was *zur,* which means light. This word is remarkable not only as being a

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monosyllable—Drome, of course, is another—in this language of polysyllables but also for a resemblance that will be set forth by the following, which I take from the writings of the great scientist Sir John Herschel:

"In a conversation held some years ago by the author of these pages with his lamented friend, Dr. Hawtrey, Head-Master and late Provost of Eton College, on the subject of Etymology, I happened to remark that the syllable *Ur* or *Or* must have some very remote origin, having found its way into many languages, conveying the sense of something absolute, solemn, definite, fundamental, or of unknown antiquity, as in the German words *Ur-alt* (primeval), *Ur-satz* (a fundamental proposition), *Ur-theil* (a solemn judgment)—in the Latin *Oriri* (to arise), *Origo* (the origin), *Aurora* (the dawn)—in the Greek *Opos* (a boundary, a mountain, the extreme limit of our vision, whence our *horizon*), *Opaw* (to see) *Opoos* (straight, just, right), *Opkos* (an oath or solemn sanction), *pai* (the seasons, the great natural divisions of time), etc. 'You are right,' was his reply, 'it is the oldest of all words; the first word ever recorded to have been pronounced. It is the Hebrew for LIGHT . . . AOR.' "

And there, down in Drome, is the word *zur*, and it means light. Whence came that word *zur* into the Droman language? Its semblance to *ur* or *or* or *aor* is unequivocal. Is that semblance a mere coincidence? Or did these syllables have a common origin?

Of course, there is no answer forthcoming. In all likelihood, there never will be an answer.

Periods of gloom are by no means a rarity in Drome, so

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lamps are always kept in readiness, and no Droman would think of beginning a journey into a dense forest without some kind of lamp, lantern or torch. Gloom, then, they accept as a matter of course; but in utter darkness their minds are a prey to fear and to something akin to horror. Superstition is rampant in Drome, and some of the worst species of it have their origin in these very eclipses. Among this strange, and in some ways truly wonderful, people, there is an astonishing mingling of good sense, a genuine love for some branches of science, and a belief in omens, portents, prodigies and other things of that kind, that would make your hair stand up on end.

Probably you will better understand that scene which I have just described—that in the utter darkness—and better understand that one which was so soon to follow when I say that one of their old prophets, as it is recorded in their sacred writings, foretold a time when the light is to go out to shine no more—a time when Drome is to be in a darkness that will last forever and forever.

The song ended, Drorathusa came over and placed herself between Rhodes and me; and then we quitted that landing-place, ascended a short flight of steps, passed through a most beautiful court and then, having ascended more steps, entered the palace itself.

Our little party was conducted straight to the throne-room.

And straight down the great central aisle we went and stood at last before the queen herself.

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Chapter 41

A HUMAN RAPTOR

THERE IS NOTHING, AS WE THEN saw, servile, debasing in Droman court ceremonial. The meanest Droman, indeed, would never dream of kneeling before his queen. A Droman kneels to no man or woman, but to the Deity only.

The sovereign does not owe her queendom to birth, but to merit, or to that which the Dromans deem as such. She is chosen, and she is chosen queen for life, though, if she prove herself unfit for the throne, the Dromans may remove her. I say 'she, and I mean she. The Salic law excluded a woman from the throne of France; the Salic law of Drome excludes a man; or, as the Dromans are wont to put it. "No man may be queen." A proposition that even the most Socratical Droman philosopher, and Drome has had many a one, has never been known to dispute!

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As to the choosing of the Droman sovereign, I should perhaps explain that every one does not have a voice in this. Beggers, prodigals, sociophagites, dunces, nincompoops, fuddle-caps, half-wits, no-wit-at-alls, sharpers, crooks, bunko-men, bandits, thieves, robbers, highwaymen, burglars, crack-pots, fools, madmen and murders, and some others, are all (I know that this is perfectly incredible and awful, but I solemnly assure you that it is a fact) interdicted the ballot.

Alas, it grieves me more than I could ever express to record so sad an instance of benightment in a people in so many ways so truly enlighted and broadminded. But I take pride in saying that, when I had attained to something like a real knowledge of the Droman tongue, I described to Lathendra Lepraylya herself, at the first opportunity and in the most glowing and eulogistical language at my command, though confining myself strictly to the truth, how beautifully we did those things in the World Above.

I had (yes, I confess it) flattered myself that I would thus be instrumental in bringing about a great reform, in righting a cruel injustice. Vain vision, vain alluring dream! As I went on with my panegyric, I saw wonder and amazement gathering in the beautiful eyes of Lathendra Lepraylya. When I had finished, she sat for some moments like one dumfounded. And, when at last she spoke, it was, as old Rabelais has it, as though her tongue was walking on crutches. What she said was:

"My Lord, Bill Carter!"

And again after a pause:

"My Lord Bill Carter!"

At this point I noticed that Milton was smiling at me with great apparent amusement.

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"But, then," Lepraylya added, "it must be an allegory. I confess, however, that the meaning, to my poor intellect at any rate, is involved in the deepest obscurity. Yes, an allegory it must be. Surely this world that you have described to me exists only in the imagination; surely it is an imaginary world inhabited by imaginary sane people that are in reality lunatics!"

But this *is* anticipating.

There we stood before Lathendra Lepraylya, the Queen of Drome.

And what a vision of loveliness was that upon which we stood gazing! Strange, too, was the beauty of Lathendra Lepraylya, what with her violet hair. Yes, I wrote violet, and I mean violet. (Her age I put at about thirty.) The eyes were large and lustrous, were of the lightest gray, the pallid color of them and the violet of her tresses enhancing the weird loveliness of her.

With her right hand she held the scepter; one end of it rested upon the dais, upon the other was a statuette—of Zeeleenoanthelda, the half-historical, half-mythical first sovereign of Drome. Upon Lepraylya's brow, in a bejeweled golden diadem, was a large brilliant of pale green, flashing when she moved her head with prismatic hues and fires.

But this woman before whom we stood was no mere beauty. That one saw at the first glance. Wonderful, splendid, one felt, was the mind of her, the soul of Lathendra Lepraylya.

And not only that, but it was as though there was something uncanny in those pale gray eyes when she turned them to mine. That look of Lepraylya's did not meet look;

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it seemed to go right into my very brain, to search out its thoughts and its secret places.

At the time it seemed long, but I suppose that no more than a few seconds passed before she turned her eyes to Milton Rhodes, upon whom they seemed to linger.

And what were the thoughts of the queen as she saw before her two men from another world?

We could, of course, only guess.

And here again had superstition and a prophet loaded those dice upon a throw of which the fate of Milton Rhodes and myself depended; for one of the prophets had foretold the coming of men from another world—men who would be the harbingers of fearful calamities for Drome.

The snowy face of the queen was cold, impassive. Even when she slightly raised her right hand and the scepter to us in salutation, not the slightest change was perceptible upon a single lineament.

The next moment, however, there was a change—when she addressed Drorathusa. For each of the others of our little party Lepraylya had a kind word, and then we all moved back a few steps to the seats which had been reserved for us, all, that is, save Drorathusa. She, we at once perceived, was about to give an account of the journey up to the mysterious, the awful World Above.

There was not a vacant seat in all that great room, save one—that for Drorathusa. This was a little to the left of the throne, as one faces it, together with a dozen or so others, all occupied by persons whom I at once, and rightly, set down as priests and priestesses.

Of this small group (small but very powerful) every

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member save one was dressed in a robe of snowy white. As for the individual in question, his robe was of the deepest purple, and he had round his head a deep-blue fillet, in which was set a large gem, a diamond as we afterwards learned, of a red so strange and somber that one could not help thinking of blood and dreadful things.

We thought that this personage was the high priest, and in this we were not mistaken. He was about sixty years of age, lean to emaciation and with the cold, hard look of the fanatic in his eyes and, indeed, in his every lineament. His face, smooth-shaven, as is the Droman custom, was like that of some cruel bird of prey. Coldly he received, and returned, the salutation of Drorathusa, and dark with malevolence had been the look which he had fixed upon Rhodes and me.

There could not be the slightest doubt that this human raptor purposed to rend us beak and talon.

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Chapter 42

HE STRIKES

DRORATHUSA BEGAN HER STORY. Lathendra Lepraylya leaned forward, rested her chin on her left hand and listened with the most careful attention. So still were the listeners that, as the saying has it, you could, anywhere in that great hall, have heard a pin drop.

At times, so expressive were her gestures, Rhodes and I had no difficulty whatever in following Drorathusa; but only at times. I have, however, had access to a transcript of the stenographic record of her story (the Dromans, despite the remarkable polysyllabic character of their language, have most excellent tachygraphers) and I wish that space would permit inclusion of it here.

When Drorathusa had finished, the queen, who had several times interrupted with some interrogation, put a number of questions. With two or three exceptions, the answers given

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by our Sibyl seemed to be satisfactory. But those exceptions gave us something to think about. It was obvious that the queen was troubled not a little by those answers; and she was not, I believed, a woman who would lightly suffer the mask to reveal her thoughts or her feelings.

When the queen had done, came the turn of that high priest, whose name was Brendaldoombro. Up he rose and addressed a few words to Lathendra Lepraylya. Her answer was laconic, accompanied by an assenting motion of her right hand. For a few seconds her look rested upon Milton Rhodes and me, and it was as though across those strange, wondrous pale eyes of hers a shadow had fallen.

As for the high priest, he had instantly, and with a fierceness that he could not bridle, turned to Drorathusa.

How Rhodes and I, as we sat there, wished that we could understand the words being spoken!

"Always, O Drorathusa," said Brendaldoombro, "has your spirit been strange and wayward. Always have you been a seeker after that which is dark and mysterious. And, of a truth, dark and mysterious is the evil which you have brought down upon Drome.

"Never content with what it is given us to know! Always seeking the obscure, the concealed! Sometimes, I fear, even *that which is forbidden!*"

At those words the eyes of Drorathusa flashed, but she made no answer.

"Cursed was that hour—cursed, I say, be that peeking and searching and peering that discovered it to your eyes, that record of those who, led on by the powers of the Evil One, ventured up into the caves of darkness and at last up

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into the World Above itself—a world, as our holy writings tell us, of fearful and nameless things, of demons who, to achieve their fell purpose"—here he fixed his vulture-eye upon Milton and me—"assume the shapes of men.

"But you, O Drorathusa, must needs find that record, that writing which never should have been written. And you must needs turn a deaf ear to our words of counsel and admonition. But you must needs beg and beseech and implore our permission to go yourself up into those fearful places and there see with your own eyes whether that in the writing was true or false. And we, alas, in an evil hour and one of weakness—yes, we did yield to your importunities and your wicked interpretation of our sacred writings, and we did suffer you to go forth."

It seems, however, that just the opposite was the truth—that Brendaldoombro, fearing the growing popularity and power of this extraordinary woman, had been only too glad to see her start for the caverns of darkness, from the black mysteries of which he, of course, had hoped that neither she nor a single one of her companions would ever return.

"Yes, evil was the hour in which you went forth, O Drorathusa the Wayward One. And evil is this in which we see these demons in the shapes of men sitting in our very midst, before the very throne of our queen. Already has God shown His anger, shown it in this darkness which has sent fear to the stoutest heart—this darkness the like of which no living man has ever known in Drome.

"Nor," he went on, his voice rising, "will the Divine wrath be softened so long as we, undutiful children that we are, suffer them to live—these devils that have come

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amongst us in the forms of men! Death!" his voice rising until the hall rang with the fierce tones. "Death to them, I say! Let death be swift and sure! And thus will Drome be spared sorrows, blood and miseries that, else, will wring the heart of the babe newborn and cause it to rise up and fearfully curse father and mother for bringing it into a world of such madness and woe!"

The effect of this impassioned and fiendish outburst was instantaneous and fearful. Something that was like a groan, a growl and a roar filled that great room. One who has never heard it could never believe that so strange and so frightful a sound could come from human throats. The Dromans sprang to their feet—not men and women now, but metamorphosed by the cunning and the diablerie of Brendaldoombro into veritable fiends.

"We're in for it, Bill!" cried Milton, springing to his feet and whipping out his revolver.

I sprang to his side, and we faced them.

Drorathusa, with a fierce cry, threw herself between us and the crowd. We were moving slowly backward, back toward the throne. The voice of our Sibyl rang out clear and full. A moment or two, and it was evident that her words were quieting the mad passions of the mob, for mob, at that moment, it certainly was, though composed of the élite of the Droman world.

Then of a sudden, full, clear, ringing and aquiver with wrath and suppressed passion, came the voice of Lathendra Lepraylya.

Oh, what a vision of fierce loveliness was she as she stood there!

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Brendaldoombro had come within a hair's-breadth of achieving his diabolical purpose. And a most ugly vision of thwarted evil was he at that moment. He knew his auditors, though, and he knew his power. Again he raised his impassioned voice. Lepraylya, however, turned upon him fiercely.

"Peace!" she cried. "I bid you, peace—yes, even you, O Brendaldoombro, High Priest of Drome though you are!

"What! You would still make of this room a shambles, stain the very throne of your queen with human blood!"

"They are not human!" he shrieked. "They are demons that have assumed the bodies of men!"

A murmur of superstitious horror arose.

"Ho, guard!" cried the queen. "Guard, ho!"

It is my belief that some cool-headed gentleman had bethought himself of the guard before ever the queen, for it was only a few moments before a score or so of armed men had entered the room and taken a position, in the form of a semicircle, before the throne.

The eyes of Lathendra Lepraylya were blazing like that great jewel on her brow. Those eyes were fixed upon Brendaldoombro, and I actually thought that the old raptor quailed a little under that look of outraged majesty. If this was indeed so, it was for an instant or two only. His look, one of baffled fury, then became fixed and defiant.

"So!" said Lathendra Lepraylya. "What madness is this that I see? What blood-howl is this that I hear? No woman or man in Drome may be deprived of liberty or life without a fair trial; and yet you, yes, even you, O Brendaldoombro, are here striving to make a shambles of the very throne itself."

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She raised her hand and pointed toward us.

"If these men are indeed—"

"They are not men!" the old villain shouted. "They are demons who have taken the human shape, to attain here in Drome some fell purpose. Death, I say! Death to these masqueraded devils! Let death be swift and —"

"Peace, I say!" exclaimed Lepraylya, stamping her sandaled foot. "And, if these men from the World Above are indeed but devils counterfeit, could we kill them, O Brendaldoombro? Since when can mere man kill a devil?"

"When they are in the human shape, he can! Death! Death to these fiends who—"

"One can kill their bodies only," interrupted the queen, "and it may be that he can not do even that much."

"Their bodies only? What more," demanded Brendaldoombro, "can one do to any woman or man? Death! Death to these demons!"

"Their spirits would be but loosed from the body, O Brendaldoombro, to move unseen in the air about us, and they could then—if, that is, they really are devils—the more easily achieve their nefarious designs."

"They would be harmless then!" came the ready answer. "They are helpless save when they are in the human form."

"Since when?" queried Lepraylya, her eyes widening in surprise. "Since when did the minions of the Evil One become helpless unless in human shape?"

"You misapprehend, O Lathendra Lepraylya. These belong to a most peculiar order, to a most rare species of bad angel. And," cried Brendaldoombro, "they are the worst devils of all! Death to them before it is too late! Let us—"

"Have justice," said Lepraylya, "as we hope for mercy

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and justice in that dread day when every human soul—even yours, O Brendaldoombro—must stand and be judged for the sins it has done in the flesh. No human being may be condemned in Drome without trial; and I believe that Lord Milton and Lord Bill are true men, O Brendaldoombro, and no demons. And you would slay them, murder them, these the first men from the World Above, as you would slay a *gogrugron*—if you did not fear it, O Brendaldoombro. Who knows what message they bring to us? Now they stand silent; but, when they will have learned our language, then we shall learn that which is now so dark and so mysterious."

"Dark and mysterious indeed!" cried the high priest. "Signs and portents have been given us, warning us of what is to follow if we harbor these demons amongst us. And I tell you, O Lathendra Lepraylya, you and all Drome shall rue this day if you heed not the dread warnings of the wrath Divine. Darkness I see! Yes, I see, darkness! And earthshocks! The roof of our world crashing down! Calamities that will overwhelm all Drome and—"

"Silence!" Lepraylya commanded. "Silence, croaker of evil! One would almost think, O Brendaldoombro, that you know more about the angels of the Evil One that you do about God's own. Hear now my word:

"When Lord Bill and Lord Milton can answer the charge that they are demons masquerading in the shapes of men, then, O Brendaldoombro, and not before, shall they be brought to trial—if, indeed, you will prefer that charge against them *then.*

"Such is my word to you, O Brendaldoombro, and to you, ladies and lords all, and on the majesty of the Droman law and of the dread law of God it stands."

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Chapter 43

DRORATHUSA

AND SO IT WAS THAT WE REACHED, there in the palace of the Droman queen, our journey's and—certainly a stranger journey than any I ever have heard of and one that ought to prove of even greater interest to scientists than to the world in general.

If, however, what they tell of the region is true, an expedition to the mysterious land that the Dromans call Grawngrograr would make our journey to Drome look like a promenade to fairyland.

But our journey ended there in the palace, and now it is that my story rapidly draws to a close.

Probably you will think that, there under the aegis of Lathendra Lepraylya, we found ourselves in clover. And, in a way, this was undoubtedly so. We were given each a splendid suite of rooms in the palace itself, and our lives

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were as the lives of princes, save that the close protective guard always kept over us was a reminder that there was such a personage in the world as one Brendaldoombro.

If it had not been for that vulture-shadow, how wonderful those days would have been!

But that shadow was there, and it never lifted. And the worst of it was that everything was involved in the deepest gloom and mystery, what with our ignorance of the Droman language. Forsooth, however, had we been masters of that language, we could not have known the plots that were hatching in the dark skull of Brendaldoombro.

As for the language, we were studying it with diligence, and we really had cause to be astonished at the rapidity of our progress.

As to the high priest, crafty and consummate villian though he was, that worthy found that Lathendra Lepraylya was quite his match and more than his match, as, indeed, was Drorathusa. Against the queen he was, of course, powerless to take any repressive measure; but the case was very different with regard to Drorathusa. He could act in this way, and he did.

She was sent to a distant, lonely, forsaken place on the very outskirts of the kingdom, or, to be precise, queendom. According to all accounts, that spot is really a terrible one. Drorathusa was, in fact, in exile, though Brendaldoombro did not like to hear any one call it that. But almost everybody did or regarded it as such, and there were murmurs, not only amongst the Droman people, but even amongst those priestesses and priests whom the old villian had counted upon to applaud his every word and act.

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Nor did time still those murmurs. On the contrary, they grew louder, more persistent. Brendaldoombro was learning that it is one thing to send a person into exile and quite another to banish that person from the popular esteem. Nor did he stop at banishment; he had recourse to the assassin's dagger and the arts of the poisoner. But, in all these attempts upon the life of Drorathusa, he was thwarted by the agents of the queen. Lepraylya knew her opponent, and had at once taken measures to safeguard the life of the exiled priestess, who held as high a place in the esteem of her sovereign as she did in the hearts of the people.

How strange it seems to be writing of things like these in this the Twentieth Century, the Golden Age of Science! But, as I believe I have already remarked, Science hasn't discovered everything yet. This is a stranger, a more wonderful, a more mysterious old globe than even Science herself dreams it to be.

When our acquisition of the language became a real one, we began to learn something of the science of Drome and to impart a knowledge of the wonderful science of our own world. Never shall I forget the amazement of the queen and those learned men of Drome when Rhodes brought his mathematics into play. Problems that only a Droman Archimedes could solve and that only after much labor (what with their awful notation) Rhodes solved, presto—just like that! So unwieldly was the system of notation employed by these Hypogeans that even their greatest mathematicians had been able to do no more than roughly approximate *pi*.

When Rhodes proceed to the solution of trigonometrical problems, their amazement knew no bounds. And, when he

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explained to them that all they had to do to become masters of such problems was to discard their cumbersome notation and adopt the simple numerals used by ourselves—well, I do actually believe that that was the straw that broke the back of Brendaldoombro's power! For (strange though it may seem to a world that is more interested in any kind of abracahokum, and especially any kind of political jiggumbob, than it is in science) that brought over to our side virtually every learned man in Drome and a majority of the people themselves. Nor should I forget the priestesses and the priests. Your average Droman is much interested in all things of a scientific nature, and no one more so than the true priestess or priest, though there are, of course, some lamentable exceptions.

Yes, clearly we were men and not demons, else never would we have brought such wonders as these to offer them as gifts to the Dromans.

But old Brendaldoombro had his answer ready.

"Instead," said he, "that proves that they are *not* men; only devils could be such wizards!"

I have often wondered what dark thoughts would have passed through that dark brain of his had he been there the day that Milton Rhodes showed Lathendra Lepraylya, all those learned men and all those grand lords and ladies (ladies and lords, a Droman would say) the marvels of a steam-engine. Yes, there the little thing was, only two feet or so high but perfect in all its parts, puffing away merrily, and puffing and puffing, and all those Dromans looking on in wonder and delight.

Even as we sat there, came word that Brendaldoombro

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was dead. He had died suddenly and painlessly just after placing his hand in blessing on the head of a little child.

Well, they gave him a magnificent funeral.

Peace to his soul.

On the death of the Droman high priest (or priestess) a successor is chosen, in the great temple in the Golden City, by a synod composed of exactly five hundred, the majority of whom are usually priestesses. On the very first ballot, Drorathusa (who was already on her way back from her lonely pace of exile) was chosen.

Priestesses and priests, I should perhaps remark, are free to marry, unless they have taken the vow of celibacy. This (voluntarily, of course) many of them do. Drorathusa, by the way, had not done so.

Came, as last, the day when Milton Rhodes told me that he was going to be married—to Lathendra Lepraylya herself. The news, however, was not wholly unexpected.

Well, every man of us can't marry a queen—though of queans there are plenty.

I take the following from my journal:

"They were married today, about ten o'clock, in the great temple; and a very grand wedding it was, too. Drorathusa herself spoke the words that made them man and wife, for the sovereign of Drome can be married by the high priestess or priest only.

"Now, as she proceeded with the ceremony, which was a very long one, I thought that that pale face of Drorathusa's grew paler still and that a distraught look was coming into her eyes. Then I told myself that it was only a fancy. But it was not fancy. For of a sudden her lip began to tremble,

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her voice faltered, the look in her eyes suddenly became wild and helpless—and she broke down.

"A moment or two, however, and that extraordinary woman had got control over herself again.

"She motioned the attendant priestesses and priests aside; a wan smile touched her lips as she pressed a hand to her side and said:

" 'It was just my heart—but I am better now.'

"She at once proceeded with the ceremony, voice and features under absolute control. Again she was Drorathusa the Sibylline.

"And so they were married. And may they live happy and very happily ever after!"

And then, after the great nuptial banquet in the palace, off went the happy pair in the queen's barge for Lella Nuramanistherom, a lovely royal seat some thirty miles down the river; whilst I betook myself to the solitude of my rooms, there to ponder on the glad-sad lot of man, to hear over and over, and over again, those low tragic words:

"It was just my heart—but I am better now."

"*Amor,*" says Saint Jerome, "*ordinem nescit.*"

Beautiful, Sibylline, noble, poor Drorathusa!

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Chapter 44

WE SEE THE STARS

WHEN FACING THE DANGERS, MYSteries, horrors (and other things) of our descent to this strange and wonderful subterranean land of Drome, how often did I say to myself:

"If ever I get out of this, never anything like it again!"

And I truly believed it at the time, though I should have known better. I should have known—I *did* know that adventure and mystery have inexplicable and most dreadful charms. Indeed, the more fearful the Unknown, the more eager a man (one who has heard the Siren song which adventure and mystery sing) is to penetrate to its secret places—unless, indeed, the charms of some Lepraylya or Drorathusa entwine themselves about the heart. In my case—well, *Amor ordinem nescit.*

Here was I in the Golden City; here was everything, *it*

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would seem to another, that could conduce to contentment, to that peace of mind which is dearer that all. And yet I was restless and very unhappy.

And the Unknown was calling, calling and calling for me to come. To what? Perhaps to wonders the like of which Science never has dreamed. Perhaps to horrors and mysteries from which the imagination of even a Dante or a Doré would shrink, would flee in mad terror—things nameless, worse than any seen in a horrible dream.

But I wanted to go. Yes, I *would* go. I would go into that fearful land of Grawngrograr—discover its mysteries or perish in the attempt.

And I am going, too. That journey has not been abandoned, only delayed.

It was like this.

I was drawing up, in my mind, tentative plans (my purpose was yet a secret) when one day Milton Rhodes came in, and, after smiling in somewhat enigmatic fashion for some moments, he suddenly asked:

"I say, Bill, how would you like to see the stars, the sun again?"

"The sun? Milton, what do you mean?"

"That I am going back to the surface, out onto the snow and ice of Rainier, back to Seattle. I thought that you would want to go along."

"What in the world," I exclaimed, "are you going back for?"

"There are many things that we ought to have here in Drome; a book of logarithms, the best that I can get, is one of them. We'll get those things, or as many as we can,

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for it would, of course, be impossible to bring them all. We'll wind up our sublunary affairs, and, hurrah, then back to Drome! What do you say to that, old *tillicum?*"

"What does Lepraylya say?"

"That I may go; otherwise, of course, there would be no going. At first she wouldn't even hear of it. She feared that it might be impossible for us to maintain secrecy—that some of our precious politicians might get down into Drome. I am sure she believes that the kingdom would have more to fear from half a dozen of those sons of Proteus than from an army of sixty thousand men. And, bless her heart, when I think of some of their blunders, asininity, hypocrisy, lying, stupidity, coat-turning and sheer insanity, I am of opinion that there is not much exaggeration, if any, in that idea of hers.

"But I have at last gained her consent. With our large party, there can not be any danger."

I was not sure of that, but I kept those thoughts to myself.

"Of course, I want to go," I told him. "But I want to come back to Drome."

"Most assuredly, Bill, we'll come back to Drome."

"But," said I, "there is something that I don't understand."

"Which is what?"

"We *can't* keep our great discovery a secret. And, as soon as our world has it, adventurers, spoilers, crooks, thieves and worse will come swarming down that passage. We'll loose upon our poor Dromans a horde of Pizarros."

"Did I think for one single moment that what you say, or anything like it, would follow, never one step would I take towards the sun. You say that we can not keep the dis-

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covery of Drome a secret; we can, and we will—until such time as it will not matter. We will come out onto the glacier in the nighttime. Our ways of egress—I suppose we'll have to tunnel our way out through the ice, that there will not be any accommodating crevasse—will be most carefully concealed. No one will see us come out. No one will know of our journeys to and from the Tamahnowis Rocks, for they will be made under cover of darkness. No one will know.

"Fortunately, by the way, as it now turns out," he added, "when we adopted the Droman dress, we did not throw away our pants et cetera, and so, though those clothes are somewhat the worse for wear, our appearance up there on Mount Rainier will cause no remark."

"But our showing up at home," I said, "after so long an absence will cause plenty of remarks and more than remarks. How will we answer all the questions that they will surely ask us?"

"Tut, tut!" smiled Milton. "If all our difficulties could be so easily resolved as that!"

"But how will we do it?"

"We won't answer them, Bill; we'll keep them guessing."

"But suppose we find that Scranton has let out something that will give them a pretty good idea as to what has happened?"

"That might be bad," answered Rhodes. "But I have every confidence in Scranton's discretion. He will, I feel sure, maintain that utter silence which I requested, until the period designated expires. Possibly he may never tell what he knows.

"I believe, however," he went on, "that we ought to leave the world, our world, a record of the discovery. I will set

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down to the extent that time permits those things which, in my opinion, will interest the scientific world. As for the discovery itself, the journey and our adventures, yours, Bill, is the hand to record that."

"A record?" I exclaimed. "Then why all this secrecy, this moving under cover of darkness and pussy-footing around if you are going to broadcast the discovery of Drome to the whole world?"

"Because we will then have left that world and the way to this will have been blasted up and otherwise closed."

"That," I told him, "will never keep them out."

"I believe that it will. And, if any one ever does find his way down, he'll never return to the surface; he'll spend the rest of his days here in Drome, even if he lives to be as old as Methuselah. Be sure that you put that into the record! The Dromans are human, and so they are not quite saints. But their land is never going to be infested with plunderers or any of our sons of Proteus if I can prevent it, and I feel confident that I can.

"This closing of the way will not mean complete isolation. At any rate, I hope that it will not. For I feel confident that ere very long the two worlds will communicate with each other by radio. There is a possibility, too, though that possibility is indeed a very remote one, that each will even *see,* by means of television, the inhabitants and the marvels of the other."

One or two weird things befell us during our return journey, but time presses and I can not pause to record them here.

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The party was composed of picked men, one of whom was Ondonarkus. We had one ape-bat.

This going up was a more difficult business, I want to tell you, than our going down had been. There was one consolation: we did not get lost.

Onward and upward we toiled, and at last, on the 28th of June, we reached the Tamahnowis Rocks. Thanks to Rhodes' chronometer-watch and the very careful record which he had kept, we knew the very hour.

This was about ten o'clock in the morning. The way out was completely blocked by the ice. Cool air, however, was flowing in through fissures and clefts in the walls and the roof of the tunnel.

We waited until along towards midnight, for fear some one might be about, that some sound might reveal the secret of the rock.

It was about ten o'clock when we began to dig our way out through the ice. The tunnel was not driven out into the glacier but up alongside the rock wall, through the edge of the ice-stream.

Hurrah! At last our passage was through!

And, as old Dante has it,

"Thence issuing we again beheld the stars."

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